

THE INDYPENDENT

ISSUE #114, JANUARY 11 - 31, 2008
A FREE PAPER FOR FREE PEOPLE

THIS GAME IS RIGGED

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COVERAGE BEGINS, p6



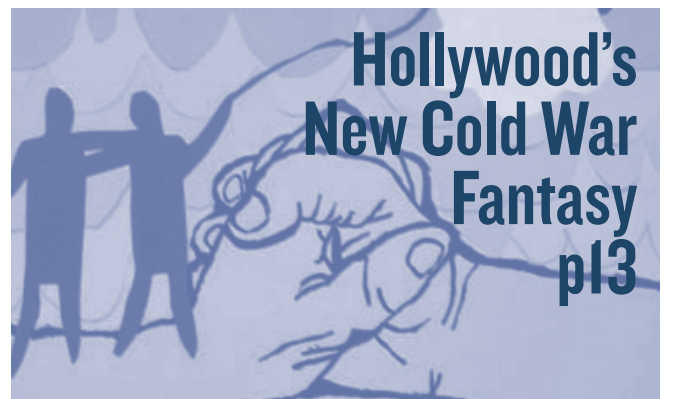
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WHAT IS INDYMEDIA?

With autonomous chapters in more than 150 cities throughout the world, the Independent Media Center (IMC) is an international network of volunteer media activists.

The IMC seeks to create a new media ethic by providing progressive, in-depth and accurate coverage of issues. We are a community-based organization using media to facilitate political and cultural self-representation. We seek to analyze issues affecting individuals, communities and ecosystems by providing media tools and space to those seeking to communicate. We espouse open dialogue and placing the means of communication and creativity back in the hands of the people, away from the drive of profit.

The Independent is funded by benefits, subscriptions, donations, grants and ads from organizations and individuals with similar missions.

WHAT CAN I DO TO GET INVOLVED?

The IMC has an open door. You can write and distribute for *The Independent*, videotape events and rallies, update the website, self-publish articles to the web, take photos or just help us run the office. As an organization relying on volunteer support, we encourage all forms of participation.

The print team reserves the right to edit articles for length, content and clarity. We welcome your participation in the editorial process.

VOLUNTEER STAFF:

Sam Alcott, Nicholas Allanach, Chris Anderson, Steven Arnerich, Eleanor J. Bader, Kazembe Balagun, Charlie Bass, Bennett J. Baumer, Lani Bouwer, Jed Brandt, Mike Burke, José Carmona, Kepfram Cauley, Matt Cavanaugh, Rahul Chadha, Susan Chenelle, Ellen Davidson, Ryan Dunsmuir, Jeff Faerber, Renee Feltz, Leo Garcia, Anna Gold, Samantha Gorelick, Liana Grey, A.K. Gupta, Mary Heglar, Irina Ivanova, Alex Kane, Ruth Kelton, Jessica Lee, Jennifer Lew, Samantha Lewis, Gary Martin, Ari Moore, Nik Moore, Ana Nogueira, Donald Paneth, Cat Perry, Louis Peterson, Nicholas Powers, Frank Reynoso, Jeremy Scahill, Ann Schneider, Andrew Stern, Caroline Sykora, Gabriella Szpunt, John Tarleton, Xavier Tayo, Erin Thompson, Dana Vindigni, Eric Volpe, Steven Wishnia, Amy Wolf and Rusty Zimmerman.

community calendar

Please send event announcements to indyevents@gmail.com.
The next editorial meeting for The Independent is Tuesday, Jan.15, 7 pm, at 4 West 43rd St, Suite 311. All are welcome.

FRI JAN 11

12:30pm • Free
ACTION: INTERNATIONAL DAY TO SHUT DOWN GUANTANAMO.
NY: Foley Sq near 26 Federal Plaza.
Sponsored by Witness Against Torture's Campaign to Shut Down Guantanamo.
DC: Actions at the Mall and Supreme Court sponsored by Amnesty Int'l and the National Religious Campaign Against Torture. nycat.org • witnessstorture.org

SAT JAN 12

8-10:30pm • \$12 general/\$9 members
MUSIC: PEOPLE'S VOICE CAFE with Tony Bird.
The Workmen's Circle, 45 E 33rd St
212-787-3903 • peoplesvoicecafe.org

SUN JAN 13

3pm • Free
SERVICE: "LET MY PEOPLE GO."
Celebrating the 200th anniversary of official U.S. ban on slavery, with actors, dancers, musicians and a mass choir.
Followed by multimedia display, even-song and refreshments.
Cathedral of St. John the Divine, 1047 Amsterdam Ave • 212-316-7490
info@stjohndivine.org

THU JAN 17

9:30am • Free
COURT SUPPORT: Trial begins for some arrested at UN/Dag Hammarskjold Plaza
"Arrest Bush" protest.
Criminal Court building, 100 Centre St

FRI & SAT JAN 18 & 19

8pm • \$10/\$15/\$25 sliding scale
PERFORMANCE: BENEFIT SHOWING OF HOWARD ZINN'S "MARX IN SOHO."
Brecht Forum, 451 West St
212-242-4201 • brechtforum.org

FRI JAN 18

7pm • \$5 suggested
DISCUSSION: "ORGANIZING WOBBLY UNIONS" with historian Peter Cole.
Also with New York's Wobblies and a

screening of a short film.
Bluestockings, 172 Allen St
212-777-6028 • bluestockings.com

SAT JAN 19

6pm • Free
MEETING: "PERMANENT REVOLUTION & WOMEN'S EMANCIPATION"
Discussion of Marxist Feminist manifesto by Murry Weiss. Sponsored by Freedom Socialist Party.
Freedom Hall, 113 W 128th St
212-222-0633 • socialism.com

MON JAN 21

11am-5pm • Free
MARCH: MLK DAY MARCH AGAINST WAGE SLAVERY. Combination initiative to urge Starbucks to give holiday pay on MLK day. Sponsored by IWW.
Meet at Wild Edibles, 2151 Borden Ave, LIC Qns • Billy: 646-645-6284
Stephanie: 201-787-6035

TUE JAN 22

7pm • \$5 suggested
SCREENING: "APAGA Y VAMONOS"
A documentary by Manel Mayol on a Chilean river that was dammed to create hydroelectricity, an act of genocide in an increasingly globalized world.
Bluestockings, 172 Allen St
212-777-6028 • bluestockings.com

WED JAN 23-TUE JAN 29

1:15, 3:15, 6, 8, 10pm • \$10.50
FILM: "DOC" directed by Immy Humes about Harold L. Humes (aka Doc Humes). Plimpton, Norman Mailer, Paul Auster and others recall this brilliant man.
Film Forum, 209 W Houston St
212-727-8110 • filmforum.org

THU JAN 24

12-1:30pm • Free
ACTION: ANTIWAR PHONE-A-THON.
Recruit pedestrians to leave Congress members voicemail messages against the war using shared cell phones.
Sponsored by Granny Peace Brigade.

JANUARY



PHOTO: FRANK REYNOSO

TUE JAN 22

7pm • Free
NEW YORK CITY INDEPENDENT MEDIA CENTER OPEN HOUSE!
Is your New Year's resolution to make media? Come learn more about three current New York City Indymedia projects, including The Independent newspaper collective, the children's newspaper IndyKids and the revived video working group. Watch The Independent, a short documentary, meet volunteers and learn how to get involved! 4 West 43rd St. (btw Fifth and Sixth Aves.), Suite 311.

On west side of Union Sq Park, 16th St & Broadway • grannypeacebrigade.org

1-3pm • Free
ACTION: COUNTER RECRUITMENT with speakers, tabling and literature for students. U.S. Military Recruiting Station, 76 W 125th (btw Lenox & 5th Ave) • jmacdmorar@aol.com

SAT JAN 26

WORLD SOCIAL FORUM DAY OF ACTION. Events worldwide organized autonomously by participants.
wsf2008.net

1pm-3pm
SKILLSHARE: IMMUNE-BOOSTING & WINTER HEALTHCARE. Sponsored by the Rock Dove Collective.
RSVP: lauren@rockdovecollective.org

SUN JAN 27

1pm • Free

SLIDE SHOW & DISCUSSION: The human face of Iran, Part II. Refreshments. All Souls Church, Reidy Friendship Hall, 1157 Lexington Ave (at E 80th St)
allsoulsnyc.org

MON JAN 28

7pm • Free
RALLY: TO SUPPORT LYNNE STEWART in her appeal. With Lynne Stewart, Ward Churchill and others. St Mary's Episcopal Church, 521 W 126th St
PatLevasseurP@aol.com

THU JAN 31

6:30pm • Free
TALK: "ABOLITION OF THE STATE: ANARCHIST & MARXIST PERSPECTIVES." With Wayne Price, sponsored by the NYMAA Reading Group.
Earth Matters Cafe, 177 Ludlow St
nchomsky.meetup.com/105

Next Issue February 1.

reader comments



BLOCKING PEACE

Response to "Israeli Democracy: Arabs Need Not Apply," Dec. 8

I think Ellen Davidson's critique of Israel's democracy is spot on and is an issue that does not get brought up much in discussions. Just how democratic is Israel's government? Not very

democratic if you are a Palestinian. Not very democratic if you are GLBT (see Gay Pride counter protests in Jerusalem). This list continues and stops at Jewish Israeli citizens who do not oppose the Israeli government's every move.

Those who offer knee-jerk excuses for the Israeli government's transgressions and crimes often do not address them in substance. They offer emotional appeals and mealy mouthed pronouncements about how Israel's neighbors are not democratic but their inch-deep analysis does not bother to mention how many of those regimes are propped up by the American government (Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Pakistan come to mind, not to mention Iraq).

Though many of the ultra-Orthodox are certainly barriers to peace, I wonder what the writer Davidson feels are the greatest barriers to any peace settlement, if that is even possible at this moment.

—ANONYMOUS

BEHIND THE NAME CALLING

Responses to "Bodies on the Line: Hundreds Delay Military Shipments in Olympia," Dec. 8

Ever notice that whenever anyone protests a war they are first given labels (i.e., liberal, leftist, communist, anarchist, or whatever they feel might stick in the mind of an uneducated reader) and then accused of doing something unpatriotic, typically not in evidence (e.g., "blocking life saving supplies" when it is non-factual — life saving supplies would be critical items, and all critical items are airlifted, not shipped by sea half-way around the globe.)

Typically, these same people, if not simply in knee-jerk mode born of belief in the onslaught of Media-Industrial-Intelligence-Military Complex propaganda, are often well-to-do folks who can afford things like stock investments in oil companies, Carlyle Groups, drug companies, and other Dick Cheney-Bush-Laden enterprises.

—H. MICHAEL SWEENEY

BRAVE OYLMPIANS

I was extremely moved by the courage and commitment of the demonstrators. Night after night, the mostly young protestors endured the cold and lack of sleep, bruises from billy clubs and burning eyes and skin from chemical weapons to stand up for what they believed in. I am as well. Thanks to the brave Olympia people-of-conscience.

—CITIZEN

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Join the dialogue! Email letters@indypendent.org, write to Independent Editors, P.O. Box 1417, NY, NY 10276 or submit your comments online at indypendent.org.

A Silent Roadside Reminder

By Andalusia Knoll

When Kevin Kaplicki stumbled upon the crash scene of Liz Padilla, a 29-year-old lawyer, who was killed while biking on Fifth Avenue in Brooklyn Park Slope, he decided that something needed to be done to acknowledge New York City cyclist fatalities.

Inspired by a street memorial project called Ghost Bike that began in St. Louis in 2003, Kaplicki and the art collective Visual Resistance decided to install a bike memorial for Liz Padilla and two others on Houston St. in Manhattan. The memorials are junk bikes painted a ghostly white, adorned with flowers and a plaque with cyclist's name, age and date of death, and are chained permanently at the accident scene.

Originally, Ghost Bike installations were anonymous. Now, the project has expanded under the umbrella of the NYC Street Memorial Project and includes 41 Ghost Bikes, memorial rides and a support group for the family and friends of those killed. There are now 30 Ghost Bike projects across the world.

“Putting up a Ghost Bike shows that this person existed, that life was lost, and that's something not to forget,” said Leah Todd, an NYC Street Memorial Project member.

Every year, a memorial ride is held the first Sunday of the new year in New York to pay tribute to the cyclists and pedestrians who were killed in the past year. On Jan. 6, 250 people rode to honor the more than 20 cyclists and 150 pedestrians who were killed in 2007. These numbers are a rough estimate based on press reports, as the NYPD only releases this data on a yearly basis. As of the first week of January, the NYPD still has not released the 2007 pedestrian or cycling fatalities statistics.

Ryan Knuckel, a co-founder of the Ghost Bike project, says that while the people the memorial rides honor are as diverse as New York City itself, one thing that they all have in common is that their deaths are



BIKER'S MEMORIAL: On Jan. 6, more than 250 riders took to the street to honor bicyclists killed on New York City streets. PHOTO: ALEX NATHANSON

commonly viewed as accidents, as opposed to crimes for which the driver should be held accountable.

Audrey Anderson's 13-year-old son, Andre, was killed while biking in Far Rockaway, Queens, in 2005. She says that although her son was struck from behind by a man who witnesses say was driving recklessly, NYPD neglected to give the driver a breathalyzer test and did not launch an investigation into Andre's death. Anderson believes when vehicles are the weapons, the killers are rarely prosecuted.

“In New York you are allowed to kill on the streets and just walk away from it. It's wrong,” said Anderson.

Karen Rancher's son Elijah was killed in St. Albans, Queens, shortly after his 12th birthday. She returned from her military deployment in South Korea to attend the memorial ride. “We're in an age of technological advancements, but we don't

respect humanity. We have countries like South Korea, China, France where you have cyclists and they take into consideration giving them the right of way ... we don't take that consideration as we drive, so we have the irreplaceable loss of life,” says Rancher.

In recent years, New York City has seen some positive developments for cyclists, including new buffered street bike lanes and a free helmet program.

Caroline Samponaro, Bicycle Campaign coordinator with Transportation Alternatives, believes further infrastructure improvements are necessary. “If we're really going to see change in our transportation system ... [W]e're going to need a system that favors pedestrians, cyclists and mass transit and stops putting all of its attention and resources towards the car-driving minority.”

For more information, visit ghostbike.org.

Iranian Couple Cycles the World for Peace and Conservation

By Jennifer Redfearn

Modern Iran shows a variety of perplexing faces to the world: hard-line President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, sophisticated academics, outspoken exiles.

One young Iranian couple, determined not to leave their country's public relations to others, is bicycling around the globe to spread a message of peace and environmental conservation.

Somayeh Yousefi, 28, and Jafar Edrisi, 29, met nine years ago atop Mount Damavand, the highest peak in Iran, and married four years later. After selling their car and furniture for \$12,000 last April, they set off to educate the world about Iran and to plant trees across the globe. They cycled through Turkey, crossed Europe and then skipped across the Atlantic Ocean before arriving in New York City in November. This is their first trip outside of Iran.

“We don't want to judge other countries by the bad stuff happening on the news,” said Yousefi, who was Iran's female rock-climbing champion for six years. “We wish to convey a message of peace and friendship from the people of Iran to other countries,” she said.

The couple plans to cover a total of 12,500 miles during their two-year odyssey. Living on an average of \$10 a day, they haul the

basics — tent, cookware and clothing — from city to city. So far, they have planted 14 trees and screened a video about Iran's natural wonders in communities all along their route.

“People are very confused about Iran,” Yousefi said. “They think Iranian people are terrorists or aggressive or that we ride camels. Iran is a rich country, but no one knows about it. So we think it is our duty to show our culture to people.”

Face-to-face contact with people in Europe and Canada countered many of the couple's own misconceptions of different cultures. But they said violent images from Hollywood movies and the media still made them wary of traveling through the United States.

“At first, we were very afraid of American people,” said Yousefi. “We imagined that American people are aggressive with a lot of guns and tattoos.”

But the couple has been surprised by the Americans they have met since crossing the Canadian border on Nov. 19. In Vermont, a stranger invited them to camp out in her home that was under construction. They met former U.N. weapons inspector Scott Ritter in Albany. Ritter encouraged the couple to educate Americans about Iran, they said. In Poughkeepsie, New York, a fellow cyclist drove them to their friend's house when it was too dark to bike.



THE OTHER FACE OF IRAN: Iranian bicyclists Somayeh Yousefi (above) and Jafar Edrisi are on a mission to dispel myths about Iran, while cycling the world and planting trees. PHOTO: JAFAR EDIRISI

These memories are recorded on a hand-painted banner they plan to carry from the United States to Japan, Korea, China, Nepal, Pakistan and Iran, the final leg of their journey.

“After my wedding ring, this is the most precious thing I have in my life,” said Yousefi, holding up the banner covered in signatures.



BEAT THE DEEP FREEZE

As temperatures plunge, many New York City tenants will break out their ski masks, wool gloves, long-underwear and down coats — just to stay warm inside their apartments.

New York City's Housing Maintenance Code requires that landlords provide hot water year round and heat from October through May when it's cold. Not having heat and hot water during the winter can turn deadly for the most vulnerable New Yorkers. Below are helpful tips to getting the heat and hot water turned on:

Keep one thermometer outside and one or two inside your apartment to measure the temperature. Between Oct. 1 and May 3, if the outside temperature (from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m.) falls below 55 degrees, the inside temperature must be at least 68 degrees everywhere in your apartment. If the outside temperature falls below 40 degrees from 10 p.m. and 6 a.m., the inside temperature must be at least 55 degrees.

If you lack either heat or hot water:

- Keep a log to accurately document when you were without heat and hot water. You can call Met Council on Housing for a copy of a log at 212-979-0611 or download it at <http://metcouncil.net/factsheets>.
- Call your super and write a certified letter to the landlord.
- Call 311 and encourage your neighbors to call and report the problem. The more calls from a building, the quicker the city will respond to the problem.
- If you experience extended periods of no heat or hot water, you can deduct money from the rent (usually a day's rent for every day without heat and hot water) or withhold rent completely. Consult an attorney or tenant organizer before doing this.

Lack of heat and hot water is a class “C” housing code violation — the most serious class of violations. If the Department of Housing Preservation and Development records a heat and hot water violation and you are rent regulated, you should also file a rent reduction application with the New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal along with a printout of the city's violation finding.

You can also file an emergency HP (Housing Part) action in housing court. This is when a tenant sues the landlord for repairs and housing code violations. A judge will order the landlord to turn the heat on or face civil penalties. In the worst cases the city can make emergency repairs to your building's boiler and heating system.

Contact a tenants' rights organization to organize your neighbors. Collective action will always get the best results.

Bennett Baumer is an organizer with Housing Conservation Coordinators.

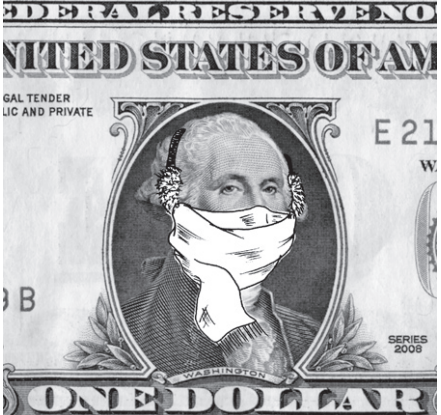


ILLUSTRATION: BRIAN PONTO

Endangered Immigrant Women Find Safe Harbor

Federal law eases journey from battered wife to legal resident

By RENEE FELTZ

Safiya Allette, an undocumented Trinidadian immigrant, endured five years of escalating abuse from her husband as she waited for him to file paperwork that would allow her to become a U.S. citizen. He never did.

“One time he was choking me so hard I couldn’t breath,” said Allette. “So, I played dead. When he came off of me I just laid there in shock.”

Allete is one of an increasing number of abused immigrants who are filing their own petition for citizenship as battered spouses of U.S. citizens, a right granted to them by the Domestic Violence Against Women Act. Unlike recent punitive legislation, this rare example of immigration reform continues to provide protection for desperately isolated members of society.

“I don’t ever want to go back there,” said the petite 26-year-old mother of three. “Mentally, it broke me down. I had no communication with my family.”

On Sept. 17, Allette became a legal permanent resident. She can apply for citizenship in five years.

Her journey from living in the United States on an expired travel visa to becoming a green card holder began in late 2005, at the Bronx office of the New York Legal Aid Society, after she shared her story with a staff immigration attorney.

“She said Safiya, ‘I think you have a case.’ And we started filing,” Allette said.

In order to file an I-360 petition, she had to prove she had been in a good faith marriage to Jerome Earl, Jr., a U.S. citizen from Brooklyn. She gathered her marriage certificate, statements from their joint bank account and birth certificates for their two sons.

Her twin sister wrote a statement describing the verbal, emotional and physical abuse she witnessed while living with the couple before she returned to Trinidad.

“This so-called man ... calls her names like

stupid, bitch and whore,” the statement reads. Allette said she left her husband several times over the course of their marriage. One time she moved into a shelter and stayed away for several months, but kept in touch over the phone.

“I would block the number and I would call him,” Allete said. “Finally, one time he said — and this is what got me — he was like ‘Okay, I’m going to file your immigration papers for you.’ I was like, okay, he’s going to do it.”

She returned home and Earl filed part of her paperwork, but she said he never finished it because he wanted her family to pay the necessary fees. His incomplete I-130 petition is one of the documents Allette used in her self-petition for citizenship.

Wendy Austrie, a staff attorney in the Legal Aid Society Bronx office who assists domestic violence survivors with immigration issues, helped Allette file her petition.

“I think it would be very difficult for someone who is in a fragile emotional state to go through this on her own,” Austrie said. “Because we know the law, we know what CIS [Citizenship and Immigration Services] is looking for. And you’re sort of fleshing it out for someone on the other side of the table to relive what the client went through.”

The Violence Against Women Act became law in 1994. Congress unanimously reauthorized it in 2005, but funding must be appropriated each year.

The Legal Aid Society’s assistance for clients like Allette is funded by private and public grants, including a grant derived from the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development. The only fee Allette paid was \$70 to get her fingerprints.

On July 30, petition fees for most immigrants increased from \$190 to \$375. But for battered women filing self-petitions the fee is now waived.

Austrie said this could further ease the application process for her clients who are immigrants from Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Honduras and the Caribbean and who often live in shelters.

Now that Allette is a legal resident of this country, she said she is focused on finding a job to support her children and save money to pursue a nursing degree.

The New York Legal Aid Society’s Bronx office recently used grant funding to hire a second attorney to help more battered women come to the end point where Allette is now.

“It was a door that opened for her,” Austrie said. “She’s young and she’s able to start fresh and learn from her past.”

The Legal Aid Society of New York can be reached at 212-577-3300 or legal-aid.org.



Homeless Face a Cold Fight

OUT IN THE WEATHER: Braving winter temperatures, organizers and community members with Picture the Homeless held an all-night “sleep-out” in the Bronx on Dec. 13 to protest new city rules denying emergency shelter to families. PHOTO: MAURICIO QUINTERO

By ALEX KANE

Prevention Assistance and Temporary Housing (PATH) intake facility for homeless families in the Bronx was home to the “sleep-out” protest Dec. 13 against the Department of Homeless Services’ policy of denying people emergency shelter. Frigid temperatures did not keep homeless families, community leaders and activist groups from voicing opposition to the Department of Homeless Services (OHS) policy in the form of a candlelight vigil, defiant chants and a press conference.

Organized by Picture the Homeless, the sleep-out was held in response to a recent decision by the DHS to deny emergency overnight shelter to families who had been deemed to have housing alternatives that they were not using. Under the new policy, the only families who remain eligible for emergency shelter are those who can show that their housing circumstances have changed since being assessed by DHS. However, advocates for the homeless say that the policy denies families with legitimate claims of having nowhere to go for the night, while endangering many of the city’s neediest.

“I spoke with a woman who came down [to New York] from Massachusetts, and she is a domestic violence survivor. At one point she had stayed briefly at her friend’s two-room apartment and she came down with three of her children, so that’s seven people in two rooms. DHS is telling that person that she could live back there with them,” said Picture the Homeless organizer Nikita Price.

Until October 2007, any family who did not qualify for permanent shelter with DHS because they were deemed to have “an available housing option” could arrive at the PATH intake center facility in the Bronx after 5 p.m. and apply for emergency shelter. Families would then be bused to shelters around the city — sometimes not receiving a place to sleep until the early morning, only to be awoken at 6 a.m. by shelter workers.

The onerous process was one that was used sparingly by many shelter seekers. According to the *New York Times*, in 2006 the average number of families applying for such temporary shelter was small — only 75 a month. However, by July 2007, the number had jumped to more than 800 a month, with

some families relying on the system for weeks at a time. According to DHS, between August 2006 and August 2007, the number of temporary shelter seekers soared 102 percent.

In order to handle the rising influx of temporary shelter seekers, the city decided to use a 2005 legal decision allowing them to deny shelter to those with housing alternatives, claiming that the system was being abused by families who simply did not want to stay in crowded living situations.

“Advocates for the homeless characterize the claim of success as ridiculous, saying that people in need of shelter are being turned away.”

“We cannot allow this subculture of ineligible families to cast a shadow on the entire process,” Robert V. Hess, the commissioner of homeless services told the *New York Times* in September 2007. “We need to get to the point where ‘no’ really means no.”

According to an Oct.29 DHS press release, the policy had the immediate effect of reducing the number of temporary shelter seekers by 46 percent, with 73 percent of families with “available housing options” no longer applying for shelter.

Advocates for the homeless characterize the claim of success as ridiculous, saying that people in need of shelter are being turned away. “When homeless people are turned away from city shelters and told to double and triple up ... of course your numbers will be down. But is this the solution we’re looking for?” Price asked.

Battered women are especially hit hard by this policy, explained Susan Lob, the director of Voices of Women, a grassroots organization dedicated to improving public assistance programs relied on by victims of domestic violence.

“For them, it’s a life and death situation,” Lob said. “Our concern around this issue is that battered women are being turned down because they have someplace else to go, and for battered women that might be a dangerous place.”



Labor Unions Eye Gains in 2008

By BENNETT BAUMER

GARY MARTIN

In 2008, labor unions will spend big and mobilize hundreds of thousands of workers to organize new members and campaign for Democratic Party candidates. The nuts and bolts of labor struggles are often lost in the presidential race, however. Union membership has continued its decades-long decline, with only 12 percent of the workforce and 7.4 percent of the private sector now unionized. Last year saw a major setback in labor regulation that could make it harder for workers to join unions. Nonetheless, the writers’ strike is still going strong and tens of thousands of Verizon workers are poised to unionize.

WRITERS’ STRIKE

The Writers Guild of America (WGA) strike against the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers (or, as David Letterman calls it: “Cowards, Cutthroats and Weasels”) is one of the rare occasions when a labor stoppage grips America’s attention span. On Nov. 5, 2007, about 12,000 writers in the West and East Coast branches of the union struck over a number of demands, including the core issue of writers wanting a greater percentage of “residuals” (a payment each time one of their works is consumed).

“We all know that no payments on new media equals a rollback in residuals. And given pattern bargaining, getting rid of our residuals means getting rid of residuals industry wide,” wrote WGA strike captain Alfredo Barrios on a blog about the labor stoppage.

The advent of the new media technology (Internet, cell phone downloads) has hurt the earnings of writers as the studios refuse to pay residuals when consumers stream content regardless of revenue generated.

The studios now pay just 1.2 percent of the distributor’s gross income to WGA members for media that consumers purchase online or through cell phones. On top of that, the WGA estimates that over the next three years big media and production companies will earn more than \$4.6 billion in new media advertisements that accompany guild members’ work.

The strike’s roots began in the mid-1980s

when the WGA took an 80 percent cut in home video residuals to help boost VHS technology. As VHS took off and gave way to DVDs, the WGA did not regain its share of the new technology’s profits. According to the WGA, writers receive about four cents for every DVD sold. That is a small fraction of the Entertainment Merchant Association’s estimated DVD industry of \$16.5 billion.

The writers’ big demand – four extra cents for DVDs and 2.5 percent of new media gross income. If the WGA obtains a greater residual percentage, it sets a precedent for other media unions and future media technologies, and, most importantly, it wins the strike.

CARD CHECK

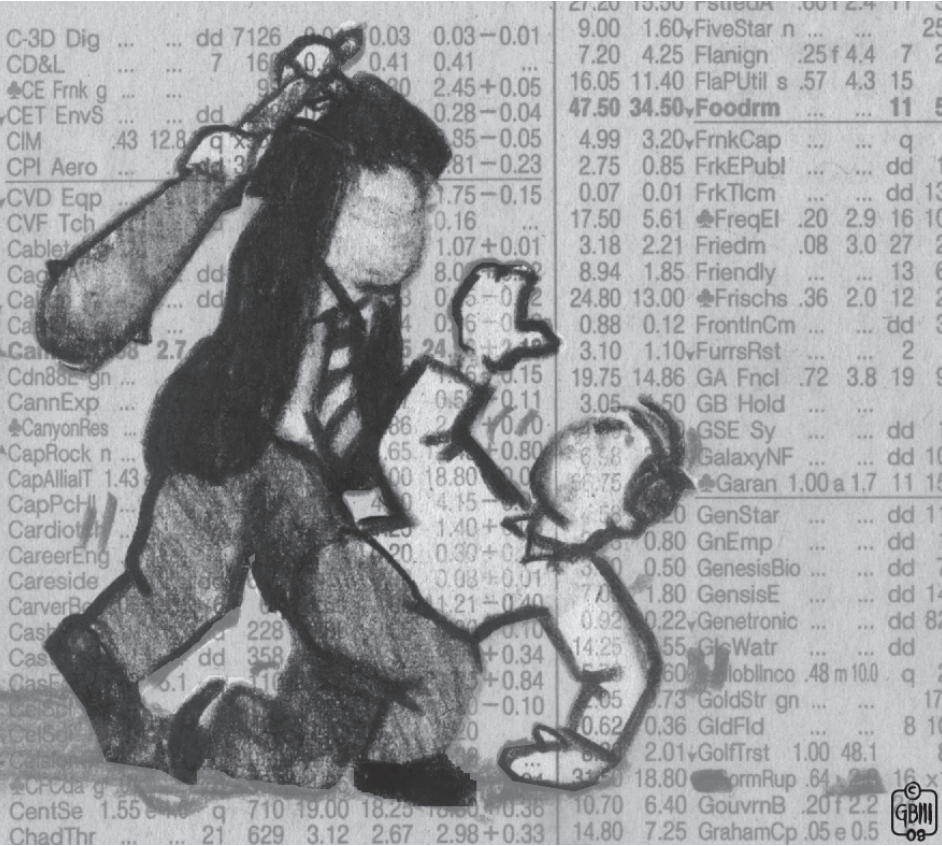
In September 2007, the Bush administration-appointed majority on the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) further weakened workers’ right to join unions through “card checks.”

Because systematic anti-union activity by management has made union elections so difficult for labor to win, unions have initiated “card check” campaigns to organize workers. The card check process occurs when a majority of workers sign union representation cards or petitions calling for a union. Most card checks are part of “neutrality agreements” in which the employer agrees not to interfere with workers’ right to organize.

The NLRB struck a blow against card check campaigns in its “Dana/Metaldyne” ruling. It allowed union decertification if just 30 percent of employees file petitions demanding decertification as soon as a majority of the workforce gains card check recognition. The petitions are presented to the NLRB, which then holds a decertification vote.

Anti-union employees at the separate Dana and Metaldyne auto-parts manufacturing corporations filed decertification petitions weeks after workers joined the United Auto Workers (UAW) through the card check process.

Neutrality agreements usually occur in non-union shops where unions have orga-



nized the company’s other plants. Workers usually join labor unions either through voting in a secret ballot election that is organized and certified by the NLRB or card checks — the employer agrees to unionization when a majority of employees sign union cards.

Though the NLRB handed down the anti-union ruling it did not stop the UAW from organizing 2,500 workers at 11 different plants through card checks in 2007.

VERIZON AND “NEUTRALITY”

In 2008, labor unions will undoubtedly see more anti-union employees file for decertification after card check certifications. Of 360 New York and New England Verizon technicians, 57 percent signed union cards in March 2007. Verizon has refused to recognize the process. In response, union organizers tried to pressure the phone company

giant by having Congress members certify the process was valid.

Though only 360 workers are currently petitioning for unionization, it could lead to tens of thousands of Verizon workers joining unions in the future. Verizon signed a neutrality agreement in 2000 with the Communication Workers of America and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, the two unions that represent approximately 97,000 Verizon workers. The agreement prohibited Verizon from interfering with the effort to organize 35,000 non-union Verizon workers.

The two unions contend Verizon is ignoring the neutrality agreement, however. In the wake of the Dana/Metaldyne ruling, look for Verizon — and other corporations — to begin decertification drives and undermine neutrality agreements in 2008.

THE
PEOPLE’S
LAWYER

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National Lawyers Guild NYC

A Crack Opens in Drug Law Sentencing

By ANN M. SCHNEIDER

Twenty-three years after this country began its disastrous experiment with mandatory federal guidelines for sentencing, what has been obvious for those on the receiving end has finally trickled up to the highest policy-making bodies of our government.

On Dec. 10, the Supreme Court gave federal judges the freedom to depart from federal sentencing guidelines, implicitly recognizing that the 100 to 1 disparity in sentencing between crack cocaine and powder cocaine is a manifestation of racism. The penalty for possession or distribution of 500 grams of powder cocaine is five years in prison, but one need only have five grams of crack to be sentenced to a minimum of five years.

The Supremes gave a break to Derrick Kimbrough, a Marine veteran of the Persian Gulf War who was charged with using a gun in conjunction with distributing crack. The Kimbrough case expanded on a 2005 Supreme Court ruling that gave a glimmer of hope to federal judges

who were disgusted by having to impose severe jail time on the young, immigrant women who were most likely to be drug mules, while prosecutors dithered about drug kingpins. The eminent Judge Jack Weinstein resigned from the bench in 1993 in order to avoid having to impose such sentences.

In 2006, more than 80 percent of the defendants sentenced for crack offenses were African American, despite the fact that only 24 percent of crack users were African American. Seventy-two percent of admitted crack users were white or Hispanic, according to the National Survey on Drug Use. Strikingly, in 1986, before the enactment of mandatory minimums, the average federal drug sentence for Blacks was 11 percent higher than for whites. Four years later, the average federal drug sentence for Blacks was 49 percent higher.

Coincidence? The 100 to 1 disparity has been in place since 1988 when Congress vastly increased the penalties in order to curb “crack-fueled violence.” But as a Chicago Narcotics Officer stated in

1990, “There is as much coke in the stock exchange as there is in the Black community. But those guys are harder to catch. Those deals are done in office buildings, or in somebody’s home. But the guy standing on the corner, he’s almost got a sign on his back. These guys are just arrestable.”

Meanwhile, the U.S. Sentencing Commission also addressed the crack-coke disparity issue on Dec. 11, by giving 19,500 prisoners the right to apply for retroactive sentence reductions.

The Sentencing Commission had recommended doing away with the disparity before. But Congress (who created the body in 1984) refused to listen to their own experts. In an amazing display of political consciousness, inmates in five federal prisons rioted in October 1995, the day after the House voted against sentencing reform. Five days earlier, Minister Louis Farrakhan’s demanded such a change at the Million Man March in Washington, D.C. The militancy of the prisoners was especially impressive, since the measure then pending in Congress wouldn’t have applied to them. It

would only help future offenders.

Mandatory minimums are still a problem. The Sentencing Commission only adjusted mid-level sentences, saying it lacks power to change the federal statutory minimum for drug offenses. So further action is needed by Congress to truly eliminate this racial disparity.

In New York State, Drop the Rock coalition has achieved a measure of victory with a law that permits some retroactive modification of the notorious Rockefeller drug laws. But the measure that was passed in Albany allows prosecutors to determine what the charges will be, placing all discretion in the hands of the district attorney. New York Assemblyman Jeffrion Aubry’s bill, still pending, would repeal the mandatory minimums, thereby restoring full discretion to the trial judge; and increase funding for drug treatment.

While much reform is still needed, these decisions represent a sea change in public and political attitude toward mandatory minimums that is probably unstoppable, like the march toward the elimination of the death penalty.

Voters Desperate for Solutions Candidates Offer Soaring Rhetoric

BY STEVEN WISHNIA

MANCHESTER, NH—"The oil companies, insurance companies, predatory student-loan companies have had seven years of a president who stands up for them," Hillary Clinton told a triumphant crowd Jan. 8, the night of her victory in the New Hampshire primary. "It's time we had a President who stands up for all of us."

Those reading the roster of the senator's corporate contributors might view her populist rhetoric skeptically, but it resonated with New Hampshire voters, who gave her the narrow win over Sen. Barack Obama. Democrats around the state almost universally identified their top four issues as ending the Iraq war, healthcare, the environment and global warming, and education, especially the high cost of college and the teach-to-the-test mandates of President Bush's "No Child Left Behind" program. Clinton supporters often cited the economy as well.

"I listened to you, and in the process I found my own voice," Clinton proclaimed.

The three leading Democratic presidential contenders, Clinton, Obama, and former Sen. John Edwards, all promise universal healthcare, but through systems in which the 47 million uninsured people would buy insurance. (Obama's plan would not actually be universal; the other two would require everyone to purchase either government or private coverage.) They fiercely promise to end the Iraq war, but only Edwards has discussed a definite deadline for doing so. (New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson, who pledged to withdraw all the troops within a year, finished a distant fourth in New Hampshire and withdrew two days later.)

That frustrates Rep. Dennis Kucinich, the most left-wing Democrat in the race, who finished fifth, garnering only 2 percent of the vote. The Cleveland congressman, running on a platform of immediate withdrawal from Iraq and a single-payer national nonprofit healthcare system, realizes that he is not going to win the presidential nomination — he is also seeking re-election to his House seat — but wants to call attention to those issues.

"Healthcare should never be a privilege based on ability to pay," Kucinich told a small but loud group of supporters at a Manchester bar. "People did not vote for a change from a Republican version of the war in Iraq to a Democratic version of the war. It is not acceptable for Democrats to say '2013.'"

The problem for Kucinich is raising his support from fringe-candidate status to that of a minority big enough to have some influence. "Unless someone comes forward and makes a commitment, and it's credible, who else will be there?" he responds. "I

think this race is going to go all the way to the convention. The very unpredictability of it will open the way for a candidate like me."

The Democrats are more solid on environmental issues. Obama calls it a "planetary crisis" and vows a "Manhattan Project for clean energy." Edwards wants to spend \$25 billion on creating "green infrastructure." Clinton says she believes we will create five million "green-collar jobs" in the next ten years. Richardson, who called for an "energy revolution," had the most detailed proposals: converting half of current fossil-fuel consumption to solar, wind and biofuel power by 2020, as well as expanding mass transit and raising fuel-economy standards to 50 miles per gallon.

Even some Republicans are acknowledging global warming. Arizona Sen. John McCain, who easily defeated Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney in the New Hampshire GOP race, opened a speech in Concord Jan. 7 by vowing to "clean up the planet" and "make global warming a priority."

At this point, the national Republicans appear fractured, with no Ronald Reagan or George Bush who's personable and belligerent enough to unite plutocrats, war hawks and working-class religious conservatives. Romney is probably the closest to a pure right-winger, but he's often obviously opportunistic and cluelessly upper-class. Mike Huckabee's base is in the religious right, but the plutocrats dismiss him as a hick. The number bar on Rudy Giuliani's speechwriter's keyboard is missing all the digits except 9 and 1. And the more doctrinaire denounce McCain for being against torture and saying that illegal immigrants are human beings.

If the Democrats are not credible on working-class issues, they will likely leave the Republicans an opening to exploit anti-immigrant sentiment in the guise of protecting American jobs. So they are using the most pro-labor rhetoric in a generation. Though Edwards is the most pugnacious, fulminating about "fighting against entrenched corporate interests" almost as much as Obama says "change," the others have invoked similar phraseology.

Clinton and Obama are not far apart on issues, but in New Hampshire they drew support from noticeably different blocs. Clinton's margin of victory came from Manchester and Nashua, the state's two largest cities, old factory towns now experiencing yuppie and Boston edge-city development. (In Manchester, the old mills by the Merrimack River are now filled with finance, real-estate and high-tech offices.) Obama won overwhelmingly

in the university areas of Durham, Keene, and Hanover-Lebanon-Lyme. Claremont, a small city in the Connecticut River valley battered by factory closings, would have been a logical place for Edwards to succeed, but he got only 17 percent there.

Clinton supporters frequently cite her brains and experience, and many remember the Bill Clinton administration as the only time since 1980 when the country didn't have a far-right President. "The '90s were good to me," says Ralph Gramazio, a 44-year-old waiter who came up from Boston to volunteer on primary day. "I was able to buy a house. There was no war. It was the first time in my adult life when I felt there was a leader in the White House who represented me." Although it is not automatic that female voters will support Hillary because she is a woman, that is a significant undercurrent. "All the women were giving me the thumbs-up sign," says a Clinton volunteer who was doing "visibility," holding up placards outside the polls.

Obama's strongest appeal is his claim that he can bring a politics of hope instead of partisan acrimony. That appeal is strongest among the idealistic young, but it also reaches their elders. "I never thought I'd say this, but this guy was better than JFK," white-haired Tommy Keane declares after Obama's speech in Lebanon. Lyme novelist Walter Wetherell, 57, perhaps sums it up best: "This talk of hope is a platitude, but people are desperate to hear it."

Though Obama is now emphasizing that he is not a magical utopian, perhaps the biggest difference between him and Edwards is their view of the venerable Frederick Douglass dictum: "Power concedes nothing without a struggle." "He's really committed to fighting for the working class. He seems to be speaking from the heart, for the American people instead of corporations," says Edwards backer Tim Josephson, a 29-year-old restaurant manager from Hanover.

What voters want, however — and what they believe the candidates are promising — is often more than what the candidates actually plan to deliver. "I just got kicked off my parents' health plan. Hopefully, I'll get a job with health insurance," says Chris Sloan of Washington, D.C., a recent college graduate who's supporting Clinton because of her healthcare proposals. But you'd still have to pay for insurance under her plan, he is told. "It's better than nothing," he replies.

Edwards supporters offer similar rationales. The Edwards healthcare plan isn't exactly the same as the Canadian system,

says Juanita Paynter, a 47-year-old office worker from Lebanon, but, "it's a good one. I think he's making promises he'll keep."

"If there's a way for people to afford it, at least there's a minimum," says Jose Vargas, 50, an environmental consultant from West Lebanon. "A lot of Americans are afraid of socialized medicine."

Edwards defends his plan by saying it's politically achievable and could evolve into a single-payer system if enough people choose public coverage over private plans. "Why not go for single-payer? If he really wants to challenge the big insurance companies, he should come out and say that," responds Eric Sawyer, 53, a carpenter from upstate New York who's staying with his in-laws in Nashua. "Don't say that it's unachievable, educate the people and lead."

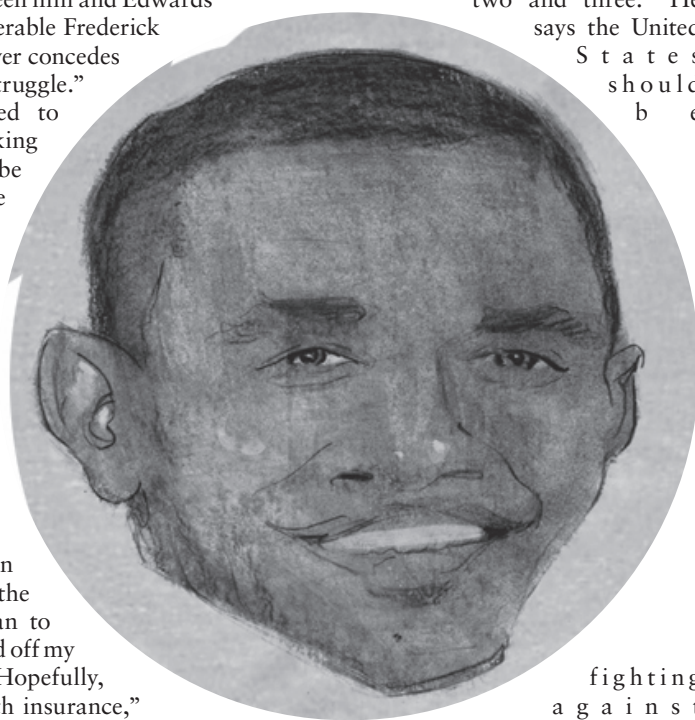
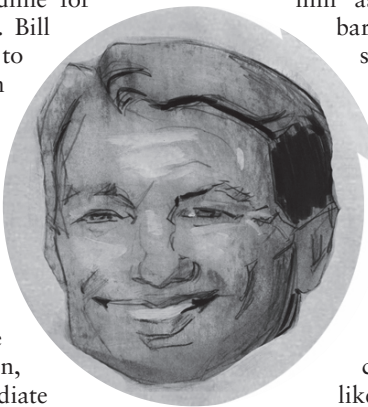
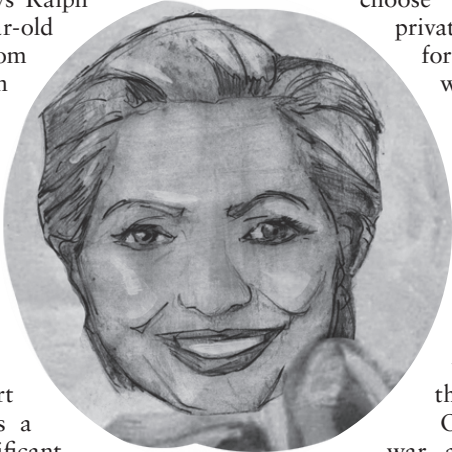
Opposition to the Iraq war appears near universal among New Hampshire Democrats, but Clinton backers cut the candidate slack on her proposal for gradual withdrawal. "We shouldn't have gone into Iraq. It was absolutely dumb," says Don McGee, a Vermont teacher standing with a "Hillary" sign by a thigh-high snowdrift in Claremont, but he believes it will take more than a year for the Iraqis to take over.

"Those two in the White House belong in jail," says Abby Krim, 46, a marketing representative from Concord. She believes a Democratic president will end the war in Iraq, but, "We've messed up their country. We can't just leave it alone."

For Malcolm Forbes, 73, a retired ex-Marine from Merrimack, the Iraq war — "and paying for the war" — was issues "one, two and three." He says the United States should be

fighting against al-Qaeda in Afghanistan instead, and that the Iraq war would end if Americans had to sacrifice to pay for it. But frustrated by the candidates' vagueness, he was still undecided the night before the primary.

ILLUSTRATIONS: RUSTY ZIMMERMAN



The Great White Hope



LEO GARCIA

By Nicholas Powers

I need to hope. Exhausted by the left’s fatalism, I sift the euphoria around Barack Obama for something real. Here is a Black man walking in Abraham Lincoln’s footsteps daring us to free ourselves from the racism that slavery left behind.

His success is tempting. He’s converted so many whites already, but having been raised around Christians, I know “conversion” is often willed blindness. It grants wonder without insight as we shut our eyes and try to find the future in the dark by sheer force of will. But inside that willed blindness is who we still are.

And “conversion” is what he inspires. But how can we “hope” after each attempt to integrate America cost so much blood. Leaders shot. People jailed. Decades of benign neglect as schools decayed, Black and Latino men packed in prison. Now the very white majority that stood by is eager to claim a Black man as their symbol.

Is it because America stands embarrassed before the world? We invaded Iraq and found no WMDs, no connection to 9/11. Now we must clean ourselves. And here comes an ambitious buppie who’ll let us wipe the blood off our hands on his skin.

Is it because whites see beyond his skin color to the content of his character? Or does his skin reflect the wished-for content of their own character, to see themselves as a people good enough to elect a Black president.

So I pull back from “hoping,” because the

euphoria has the same self-congratulation that surrounded Colin Powell’s possible candidacy. “He’ll prove we’re not racist,” the unconscious dialogue went, “If only all Blacks could be like him, articulate, well-mannered, patient and forgiving.”

Obama is a symbol of America’s displaced guilt and desired innocence. It drives his narrative, as it has nearly every presidential candidate’s. Reagan was the cowboy riding over the hills to bring morning to America; the first Bush’s “thousand points of light” were missiles raining on Iraq; Clinton was a sexual swashbuckler who opened Wall Street purses; and this Bush is also a cowboy, plastering Bin Laden “Wanted Dead or Alive” posters in the Third World frontier. Now, Sen. Barack Obama brings us “hope.”

But he doesn’t bring us hope; he takes our hope to the last door of power. African-Americans have tried for the White House like strengthening tides; first Shirley Chisom in ’72 then Jesse Jackson in ’84 and ’88. Each edged closer but never inside. If Obama wins and isn’t shot there will be a sigh of relief because we will once again have chosen feel-good wholesomeness over the hard work of healing.

It’s why Sen. Edwards’s clear-eyed “Two Americas” campaign struggles. We want a seamless America rather than to know how divided we are. The divisions cause anxiety, which is why so many respond so eagerly to Obama’s patriotic illusion. Edwards’s narrative is viable when the system is broken and it isn’t, not totally. So we “hope”

And Obama will bring some relief as the unspoken apology for slavery. But will he bring relief to the slaves of today? We still have them, because we still want coerced labor. In the United States there are 11 million illegal immigrants. John Bowe, author of *Nobodies*, writes of the 850,000 people who leave the Global South every year for our borders. They die in deserts, fall off rafts in the ocean and suffocate in cargo holds. They follow the same North Star that African-Americans did generations ago, but we don’t see Latino day workers as the new slaves.

But we will. By 2050 America will no longer be a majority-white nation. Immigrants are not welcomed, but are seen as strangers. How long before nativist anxiety turns into pogroms? How long can a house divided against itself stand?

Obama styles himself as Lincoln’s heir. Many on the left snicker, but there is danger in not seeing the significance of symbolic change. Symbolism is real.

To dismiss Obama is to miss a chance to nudge America to the truth that we are fast becoming a true rainbow. His campaign is not the solution, but his story is more important than he is. Should he enter the White House, we have to wedge our voices in the instant between America’s acknowledgment of its debt and its assumption that it’s been paid, and call for real change, knowing people want it desperately.

Obama may stand at the podium, calling on the “better angels of our nature,” but only we can let them fly.

WHO’S BUYING OBAMA

Barack Obama’s campaign has soared on his rhetoric of “change.” Many people have responded favorably, apparently tired of the disastrous Bush presidency and leery of restoring a divisive Clinton one. But how much change does Obama really represent?

He says he won’t accept contributions from lobbyists or political action committees — even though he has. Obama raised more than \$80 million through the first nine months of 2007, and it’s not coming from bake sales.

According to reports, he’s maintained ties to lobbyists to shake the money tree, and, next to Hillary Clinton, is the top recipient of money from corporations that game federal legislation and policy for their interests. The following is a sample of which corporate sectors and industries are backing Obama, and how he stacks up against the other leading recipients.

—A.K. GUPTA

AGRI-BUSINESS	Mitt Romney (1)	\$566,250
	Barack Obama (5)	\$323,528
COMMERCIAL BANKS	Hillary Clinton (1)	\$935,658
	Barack Obama (2)	\$865,856
COMPUTERS/INTERNET	Barack Obama (1)	\$940,459
	Hillary Clinton (2)	\$883,125
ENERGY/NATURAL RESOURCES	Rudolph Giuliani (1)	\$819,508
	Barack Obama (4)	\$489,909
EDGE FUNDS & PRIVATE EQUITY	Rudolph Giuliani (1)	\$1,157,900
	Barack Obama (3)	\$976,574
INSURANCE	Christopher Dodd (1)	\$713,012
	Barack Obama (5)	\$390,513
AWYERS/LAW FIRMS	Hillary Clinton (1)	\$9,596,748
	Barack Obama (3)	\$7,940,424
PHARMACEUTICALS/HEALTH PRODUCTS	Hillary Clinton (1)	\$269,436
	Barack Obama (2)	\$261,784
REAL ESTATE	Hillary Clinton (1)	\$3,939,008
	Barack Obama (4)	\$2,292,188
SECURITIES & INVESTMENT	Hillary Clinton (1)	\$4,735,730
	Barack Obama (3)	\$4,505,199
TELEPHONE UTILITIES	John McCain (1)	\$176,800
	Barack Obama (3)	\$84,936

(All information is from [opensecrets.org](#).)

Populists Need Not Apply

By Jessica Lee

The limits of the presidential election process has penned voters between corporate-backed candidates and a hard place after both antiwar candidates, Reps. Dennis Kucinich (D-Ohio) and Ron Paul (R-Tex.), were iced out of national debates, likely affecting the outcomes of both the Iowa caucus and New Hampshire primary.

Both veteran politicians have a strong grassroots following — Kucinich with progressives and Paul with libertarians and nativists — and have fought mightily for attention across the nation.

Their attempts to gain a national platform for their ideas and candidacies have been thwarted by the corporate media, which have not given them fair coverage and have excluded them from debates.

This is not some back-room conspiracy; it’s how the system works. The electoral process is slanted to those candidates who can raise hundreds of millions of dollars from corporations and the wealthy. Those with populist agendas, who threaten vested interests, such as the giant media corporations, are denied entry to the “democratic process.”

Kucinich, for example, was excluded from the Jan. 5 ABC News-sponsored New Hampshire debate after the network claimed Kucinich failed to qualify because he did not place in the top four in Iowa or poll higher than 5 percent.

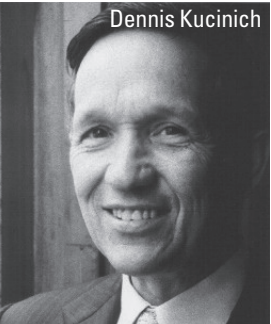
According to a joint ABC-Facebook survey, however, Kucinich polled higher than New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson, who was invited to the debate. Kucinich filed a complaint with the Federal Communications Commission on Jan. 4, claiming that ABC “is violating its obligation to operate in the public interest” and that it could not be a “true presidential primary debate without including all credible candidates, but instead

is effectively an endorsement of the candidates selected by ABC.”

ABC’s decision came after Kucinich was blocked from the *Des Moines Register*-sponsored Democratic debate Dec. 13 in Iowa. The newspaper said because Kucinich did not have an “official” office in Iowa (his campaign operated out of supporters’ homes), he was not a legitimate candidate.

It was not the first time ABC muffled Kucinich. After the Aug. 19 ABC News-sponsored debate in Iowa, the Disney-owned network posted an online survey asking, “Who won the Democratic debate?” and then removed the results after Kucinich was in the lead.

Ron Paul has faced similar roadblocks. Fox News did not invite him to join the Jan. 6 Republican debate, even though he garnered 10 percent of the Iowa vote, far more than Rudy Giuliani’s 4 percent, who was invited. In response, the New Hampshire Republican Party withdrew as a “partner” from the forum.



Dennis Kucinich

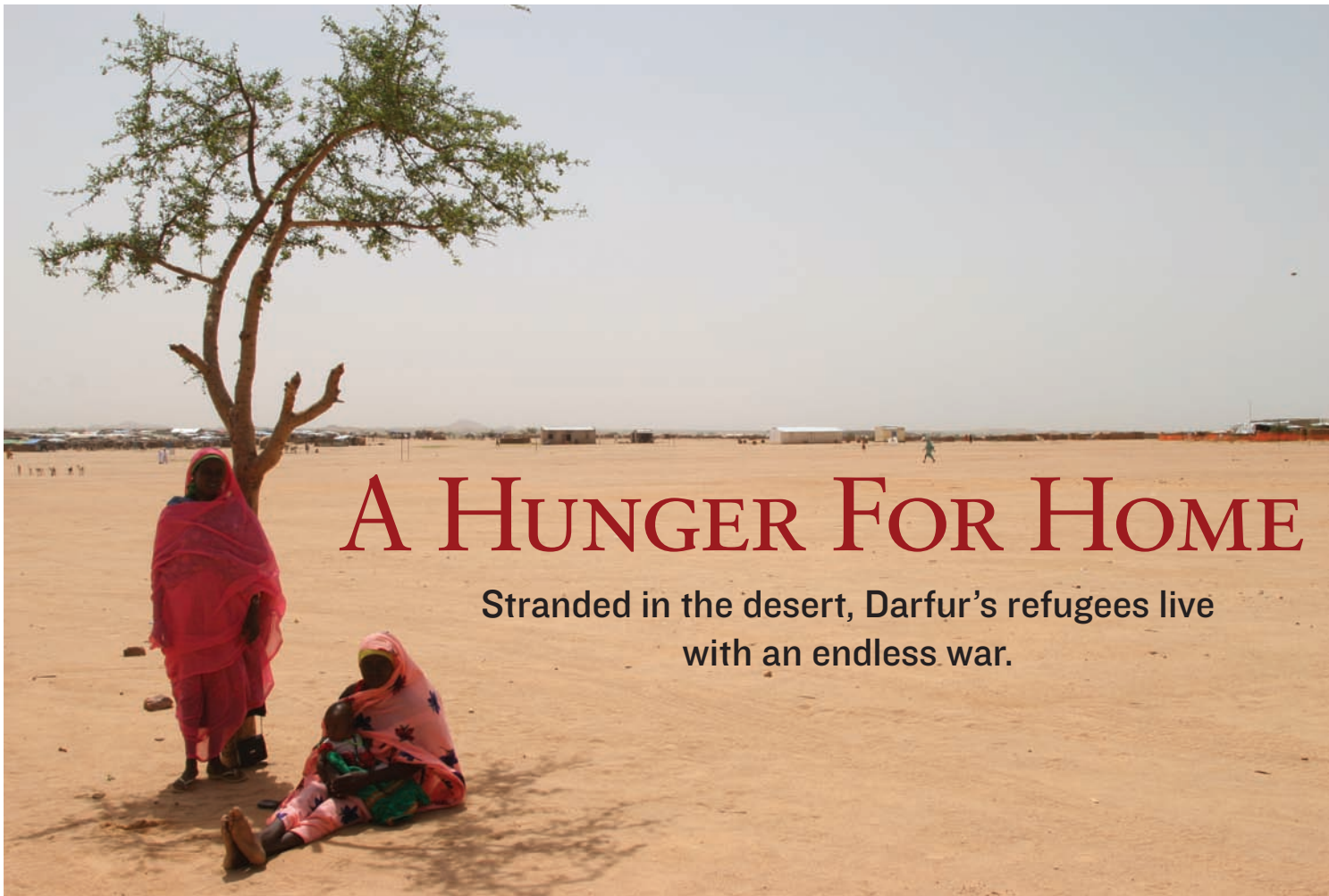


Ron Paul

Paul has significant support, as proved by his record-breaking daily fundraising haul of \$6 million on Dec. 16. Paul’s campaign claims that he has been also excluded from prominent online surveys in the last several months and was also initially blocked from attending a Republican presidential forum in Des Moines, Iowa, in June.

Voters should be appalled, but not surprised. Leaders in both parties are pulling dirty tricks to eliminate viable contenders who challenge the Wall Street-backed candidates on tough topics such as the Iraq war, NAFTA, foreign policy, health-care and the environment.

The most brazen example came during a Democratic debate last summer in Detroit after the mainstream candidates took heat for their support for the Iraq War and free trade deals. Following the debate, an open microphone caught John Edwards telling Hillary Clinton “our guys should talk,” apparently about pushing out the other candidates because “they are not serious.”



PHOTOS AND TEXT BY NICHOLAS POWERS

From the edge of her village in eastern Darfur, she saw helicopters over the huts, turning and shooting at the people below. Fatime ran over hills, across dry river beds, around bush. She ran with family away from the fading gunfire.

The sun rose and fell, spinning their shadows like a needle on a broken compass. They walked on swollen feet, breathed through dry throats, watched the horizon. Someone shouted. Men on horses trotted into the open, pulled the reins and galloped toward Fatime.

"Tribes wear the mask of a political party to benefit themselves," Joseph said.
"No one feels they belong to the same nation."

LOST IN TRANSLATION

I learned about Darfur in 2006. On TV, sorrow-creased faces begged for help. It reminded me of flooded New Orleans, families on roofs reaching up for rescue. It took a day to buy a ticket to New Orleans and be there, giving out food and picking up stories. It took almost two years to stomp the water and screams out of my mind.

I taped a map of North Africa over my bed and studied Darfur. The war appeared in the media in 2004 but it had begun in the 1890s when the English drew borders that boxed the Arab north and African south inside the same nation now known as Sudan. The English developed the north but left the south a desert. After Sudan gained its independence in 1956, the Arabs saw themselves a degree better than the Africans, and since then both have fought over the identity of the nation.

In between the rounds of war, old rituals continued. Each season, Arab herders drove cattle to the southern region of Darfur, where Fur, Masaaleit and Zaghawa tribes welcomed them. The cattle fertilized soil and helped carry supplies. In 2003, a drought in the North dried wells, turning earth to sand and forcing Arab herders south. They wanted more than grazing for cattle; they wanted new land.

Rifles were handed out to African tribesmen. Anger crystallized into rebel groups, among them the Sudanese Liberation Army and the Justice and Equality Movement. After the rebels raided a military outpost, the Arab-dominated government, flush with oil money,

bought weapons for the Arab herders creating a militia we now know as the Janjaweed.

They galloped into villages; shooting men down, ripping women apart, stuffing bodies into wells or ravines. Refugees fled to the neighboring nations of Chad and the Central African Republic. In the years that followed, 2.5 million people were driven from their homes and up to 255,000 were killed.

CAREWORN

My story begins in Chad. Last summer, I arrived in Chad's capital city of N'Djamena and was driven through a sun-lit haze of dust and traffic to CARE, the international aid agency that had agreed to host me. Joseph Makusa, a CARE finance officer, shook my hand and took me to his office.

"First thing to know is people are afraid to say what they think here. It is dangerous." His eyes searched the air for the right words. "The president Idriss Deby and his tribe keep the money and power. The rebels reached the city last April, but the French troops helped the president."

I ask, "Even after liberation, France has troops here?" Joseph nods, "They never left. Deby needs them. The country is poor; prices are rising. Oil money is flowing, but not to the people. The other tribes want power."

I ask what tribe Idriss Deby is from. Joseph says, "He is Zaghawa. Here tribal identity comes before national identity. Tribes wear the mask of a political party to benefit themselves. No one feels they belong to the same nation."

I push him, "Is the Zaghawa a minority?" He looks up, "Yes." The see-saw picture he described to me of Chadian politics seemed a slippery slope to violence. I ask if the imbalance of power could someday lead to the kind of ethnic bloodletting that occurred in Rwanda in 1994. Joseph, who is Rwandan, sighed, "I know what happened in my country but"

He blinked and then glared, "I hate tribes. I hate African politics. It uses you in a way you don't want to be used." I ask him if he lost anyone in the genocide. "Yes ... I lost many friends, many relatives," he stared into his hands. "But," he lifted his eyes. "We must keep things straight."

We left the CARE compound. "Be careful," Joseph said and I scrunched my eyebrows. "You won't get shot, but men will stick you up. It's a poor country. People are desperate."

THE NGO ECONOMY

Each day in N'Djamena some foreigner told me a new story of a murder or mugging. Every warning was a brick in an invisible wall surrounding me. If I traveled, it was by car. If I bought water or exchanged money, a local was hired to do it. I rode around, staring out of the window of CARE jeeps and imagined above dirt roads our superhighways, beside each crumbled building our glinting skyscrapers.

I met BBC reporter Stephanie Hancock at the Café Glacier. We ordered coffee and she ran down the situation. "Deby is shrewd. He used the crisis in Darfur to position himself a victim of the Sudan saying the Sudanese President Omar Al-Bashir is helping the Janjaweed and the Chadian rebels. Deby is right, but he supports the Darfur rebellion by allowing rebel groups like the Justice and Equality Movement to go into the camps and recruit.

"At least 170,000 Chadians are displaced, and Deby hasn't given food or stopped the fighting. Instead, in 2006 Deby armed Chadians, handing out 400 Kalashnikov machine guns to the Dajo tribe. He is as guilty as Al-Bashir. So when the Save Darfur Coalition blames the Sudan I think it fits the American war on terrorism narrative. Arabs, Al-Bashir and Muslim terrorists are folded into one."

"Stephanie," I hesitated not liking what I was going to say. "It seems the NGOs are the only business in town that brings money to the people." Her eyebrows rose as she nodded, "I know what you're getting at. War is an industry. Every Chadian with an NGO job supports 20 people, unlike the government. Even now, the schools are shut down and teachers on strike because they haven't been paid in six months. Just five years ago the main road was quiet, no cars only goats. Now they are busy with NGO Toyotas and motorcycles."

AN ENDLESS BORDER

On the following day, I flew to Abeche, Chad's main eastern city, and headed to the local CARE office. On the way the driver yelled at boys fighting in the street. One had curly Arab hair; the other was African. As we drove on, I watched them in the side-view mirror, struggling in the dirt and wondered how many years before someone gave them guns to finish what fists could not.

We pulled into the compound, where the CARE officer Françoise ran around showing workers floors that needed brick, electric wires to be routed and computers to be installed. "We just moved in, so you came at a bad time," she said. When we sat down, she traced her life across Africa. "I was in Mali, in Kenya and now here." She leaned in, "I'm not an expert, but tribal identity starts young. Adults will interpret what a child does as Zaghawa or Yoruba. It creates the divisions in the child that grow into civil war."

"You are going to Iriba tomorrow," she said. "I made the trip, it's beautiful. You'll be going with good drivers." We left the next morning heading north. I watched the dry yellow land rise and fall, waved to peasants who waved at us. We wrestled the land with the jeep, swaying as the driver lurched up hills, our heads bumping.

We stopped at a rain-swollen river. On our side a large semi truck pattered. The driver tied a rope around an older boy who waded

into the foamy currents, hands out like a tightrope walker. He was sucked in. The men reeled him from the river and he stumbled onto land, wiping his face. He went out, was sucked under again and reeled back. On the fifth try he wobbled out on the other side of the river. They took the rope, tied it to the truck and signaled the other driver. He started his engine and drove pulling the truck in and through the waves. My driver turned to me, "Chadians don't build bridges, but we know how to cross rivers."

We drove on as day faded to evening. Our driver turned on the headlights, and we passed like a submarine, illuminating cargo trucks caked in mud as men slept on the tires cradling machine guns. We turned away but the afterimage floated in the night.

In Iriba, I met my translator, Zoubeida. As we rode to the camp she told me, "The main tribes in this camp are Zaghawa and Fur. In July 2003 they came over the border into Chad. They were hungry, afraid. Feet blistered from walking. Women were pregnant. When they delivered, their babies died." Our truck heaved over a hill. I saw a burnt tank in the sand. She waited for my eyes to return. "In beginning of this camp they sit all day and cry. When you ask them question they cry deep."

THE REFUGEES

We ride into camp and walk through a maze of huts. We enter one and Zoubeida tells a young woman who I am. She nods and we sit. "Her name is Saida Vakhid. She is 22 years old." Saida talks to me as Zoubeida translates.

"When I was 16 my father engaged me to his sister's son who was in Libya. He never came back so he told me to marry the man's brother instead. If I did not agree, I must leave house. I had baby. After baby I didn't talk for a year." I ask of the age difference. "He was 30 she was 16." I tap the notepad. "Where is her family now?" Zoubeida translates, "She is alone."

We leave to go to a meeting of village elders. "Zoubeida, how are women treated?" She nods and lowers her voice, "Women have many problem. Women to women it's easy to talk. Woman to man is hard. A lot of beatings happen. Men are angry."

We enter a building with a large group of men sitting on the rug, the women in the back. The chiefs are on chairs. One with a glowing white turban and an ornate cane held court. I ask the universal question. "Do you get paid enough?" They laughed. "We need four times as much," they said.

"What would you like to say to Americans?"

The chief with the cane spoke with confident joy as Zoubeida translated. "We know about Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. We know when the African-American people hear our story they will help us." I winced knowing his solemn words would be drowned out in the music, movies and celebrity gossip sloshing in our ears back home.

I think of Zoubeida and wonder what she'd like to ask. "The anger from the war, does any of it cause abuse of women?" They squint at the question, shake their heads. "No we don't have that problem here."

The next morning, I asked Zoubeida if the Janjaweed use rape as a weapon. She took me to a hut where a young woman sat quietly. Zoubeida told her who I was and she spoke. "My name is Fatime Saleh," Zoubeida translated. "Three years ago the Janjaweed attacked. They came on horse and helicopter. We ran. Some of us were separated from family. I saw them kill my uncle. They shot him. We were running from the village, crying

and shouting. Five men on horses pulled me away. They raped me. I remember the whole thing. I couldn't walk. I lay there for two days. I thought I was going to die. I wanted to die. Someone saw me and gave me water. At first I didn't say anything because I was ashamed. I told my husband. He knew the situation with us. I'm always thinking about what happened. I want to go home. There is nothing new here."

Her eyes were wet and bright. Pain emanated from her like a ringing bell. I stumbled out and we drove back to the CARE compound. Night came and I climbed on the truck and rubbed my chest. It was tight as if my heart was pumping Fatime's voice. I sat there seeing her face every time my eyes closed.

LEAVING

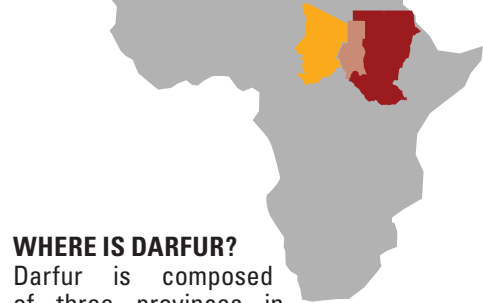
On the U.N. flight back to Abeche, I studied the land below. Grass traced underground veins of water. My trip had been similar. I flowed into Chad on the veins of Western aid, riding its jeeps and planes, sleeping on its beds and writing its story. The trickle of money and equipment from the other side of the world sustains life here.



THE TRUE FACE OF WAR: Fatime Saleh was abducted and raped by five men on horseback after fleeing attacks on her village in Darfur. "I'm always thinking about what happened," she says from a refugee camp in eastern Chad. "I want to go home. There is nothing new here." (Above) A Darfuri refugee family living in another camp in eastern Chad receives a ration of millet, the grain that is a staple of the local diet. (Below)

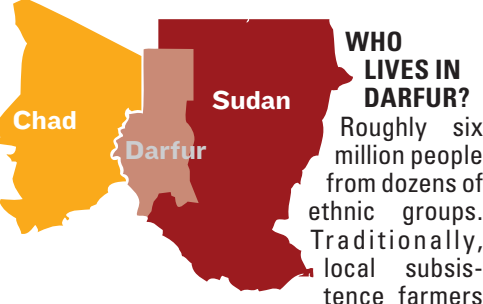


DARFUR Q & A



WHERE IS DARFUR?

Darfur is composed of three provinces in western Sudan. It is slightly larger than the state of California and borders Libya, the Central African Republic and Chad. The region has historically been marginalized, first by British colonizers and then by the Sudanese government. Southern Darfur is, however, rich in oil. The Chinese National Petroleum Corporation holds the largest oil concession in southern Darfur.



WHO LIVES IN DARFUR?

Roughly six million people from dozens of ethnic groups. Traditionally, local subsistence farmers

shared this arid East African plateau with nomadic pastoralists from northern Sudan.

WHAT ARE THE ORIGINS OF THE LONG DARFUR CONFLICT?

It began in the 1970s, simmered in the 1980s and 1990s and erupted in 2003 as the central government in Khartoum stoked ethnic tensions around access to increasingly scarce arable land and water. Some call it the first war to be sparked by climate change. Sudan had previously endured a civil war from 1955 to 1972 between the North and South.

WHO ARE THE JANJAWEED?

The Janjaweed are an ethnic militia that the Sudanese government has used as a proxy force to ethnically "cleanse" Darfur and resettle it with Arabs from the North. From 2003 to 2006, it's estimated that a quarter million Darfurians were killed and more than two million displaced, with many fleeing to neighboring Chad. The violence in Darfur provoked an outcry in the West against the government of Sudan. The Janjaweed are also accused of pushing their attacks into neighboring Chad and supporting Chadian rebel groups in their fight against the Chadian government of Idriss Deby.

WHAT IS CHAD, AND WHO IN THE WORLD IS IDRIS DEBY?

Chad is a large, landlocked nation of 10 million that gained its independence from France in 1960. Average life expectancy is 48 years. President Idriss Deby has ruled Chad since 1990. He infuriated France by signing a major oil concession with Exxon-Mobil in 1998 and has been accused of supporting rebel groups fighting his rival, Sudan's military dictator Gen. Omar al-Bashir.

WHAT'S THE LATEST FROM TROUBLED DARFUR?

A joint force of 26,000 U.N. and African Union peacekeepers is scheduled to be deployed in Darfur this month. The mission, however, has been hampered by a lack of equipment.

—JOHN TARLETON

PAKISTAN’S
DYSFUNCTIONAL
DEMOCRACY



GABRIELLA SPZUNT

BY TARIQ ALI

Six hours before she was executed, Mary, Queen of Scots wrote to her brother-in-law, Henry III of France: “...As for my son, I commend him to you in so far as he deserves, for I cannot answer for him.” The year was 1587.

On Dec. 30, 2007, a conclave of feudal potentates gathered in the home of the slain Benazir Bhutto to hear her last will and testament being read out and its contents subsequently announced to the world media. Where Mary was tentative, her modern-day equivalent left no room for doubt. She could certainly answer for her son.

A triumvirate consisting of her husband, Asif Zardari (one of the most venal and discredited politicians in the country and still facing corruption charges in three European courts) and two ciphers will run the party till Benazir’s 19-year-old son, Bilawal, comes of age. He will then become chairperson-for-life and, no doubt, pass the title on to his children. The fact that this is now official does not make it any less grotesque. The Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) is being treated as a family heirloom, a property to be disposed of at the will of its leader.

Nothing more, nothing less. Poor Pakistan. Poor People’s Party supporters. Both deserve better than this disgusting, medieval charade.

Benazir’s last decision was in the same autocratic mode as its predecessors, an approach that would cost her — tragically — her own life. Had she heeded the advice

of some party leaders and not agreed to the Washington-brokered deal with Pervez Musharraf or, even later, decided to boycott his parliamentary election she might still have been alive. Her last gift to the country does not augur well for its future.

How can Western-backed politicians be

taken seriously if they treat their party as a fiefdom and their supporters as serfs, while their courtiers abroad mouth sycophantic niceties concerning the young prince and his future.

All this could be transformed if inner-party democracy was implemented. There is a tiny layer of incorruptible and principled politicians inside the party, but they have been sidelined. Dynastic politics is a sign of weakness, not strength. Benazir was fond of comparing her family to the Kennedys, but chose to ignore that the Democratic Party, despite an addiction to big money, was not the instrument of any one family.

The issue of democracy is enormously important in a country that has been governed by the military for over half of its life. Pakistan is not a “failed state” in the sense of the Congo or Rwanda. It is a dysfunctional state and has been in this situation for almost four decades.

At the heart of this dysfunctionality is the domination by the army and each period of military rule has made things worse. It is this that has prevented political stability and the emergence of stable institutions. Here the United States bears direct responsibility, since it has always regarded the military as the only institution it can do business with and, unfortunately, still does so. This is the rock that has focused choppy waters into a headlong torrent.

The military’s weaknesses are well known and have been amply documented. But the politicians are not in a position to cast stones. After all, Musharraf did not pioneer the assault on the judiciary so conveniently overlooked by the U.S. Deputy Secretary of State, John Negroponte, and British Foreign Secretary, David Miliband. The first attack on the Supreme Court was mounted by Nawaz Sharif’s goons who physically assaulted judges because they were angered by a decision that

ran counter to their master’s interests when he was prime minister during the 1990s.

Some of us had hoped that, with Benazir’s death, the People’s Party might start a new chapter. After all, one of its main leaders, Aitzaz Ahsan, president of the Bar Association, played a heroic role in the popular movement against the dismissal of the chief justice. Mr. Ahsan was arrested during the emergency and kept in solitary confinement. He is still under house arrest in Lahore. Had Benazir been capable of thinking beyond family and faction she should have appointed him chairperson pending elections within the party. No such luck.

The result almost certainly will be a split in the party sooner rather than later. Mr. Zardari was loathed by many activists and held responsible for his wife’s downfall. Once emotions have subsided, the horror of the succession will hit the many traditional PPP followers except for its most reactionary segment: bandwagon careerists desperate to make a fortune.

Meanwhile there is a country in crisis. Having succeeded in saving his own political skin by imposing a state of emergency, Musharraf still lacks legitimacy and sections of the U.S. establishment are thinking of dumping the President.

Their problem is that, with Benazir dead, the only other alternative for them is General Ashraf Kiyani, head of the army. Nawaz Sharif is seen as a Saudi poodle and hence unreliable.

A solution to the crisis is available. This would require Musharraf’s replacement by a less contentious figure, an all-party government of unity to prepare the basis for genuine elections within six months, and the reinstatement of the sacked Supreme Court judges to investigate Benazir’s murder without fear or favor. It would be a start.

A longer version of this article originally appeared in The Independent (UK). Tariq Ali is an editor of New Left Review. His website is tariqali.org.

Family Dynasty
Silences Voice
of the People

The Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) has long championed the cause of Pakistan’s poor majority but has also been a vehicle for the personal enrichment of the Bhuttos, its founding family. The party’s founder, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, led the country from 1971-1977 before he was deposed by a military coup and executed in 1979. He is still revered to this day by the party faithful. After civilian rule was restored in 1988, his daughter Benazir was twice elected prime minister, only to be driven from office both times on corruption charges. Her husband, Asif Zardari, served as Minister of Industry and was known as “Mr. Ten Percent” for his practice of skimming kickbacks on government contracts. When Bhutto went into exile in 1999, her family’s fortune was estimated to have grown to \$1.5 billion. Last October, she returned to Pakistan to seek a third term as prime minister.

—JOHN TARLETON

WHERE DO I GET MY COPY OF *THE INDEPENDENT*?

A FREE PAPER FOR FREE PEOPLE

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- Housing Works
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- Mercer St. Books
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- MUD
307 E. 9th St.
- LES Credit Union
37 Ave. B
- Kim’s Video
6 St. Mark’s Place
- Brecht Forum
451 West St.
- The New School
(Student Lounge)
55 W. 13th St.
- Theater for the
New City
155 First Ave.

14TH TO
96TH ST.

- Manhattan Neighborhood Network
537 W. 59th St.
- Housing Conservation Coordinators
777 Tenth Ave.
- Revolution Books
9 W. 19th St.
- Chelsea Sq. Restaurant
23rd & Ninth Ave.
- Kim’s Video
114th St. & Broadway
- Labyrinth Books
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121st St. & Claremont
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- Julia de Burgos Cultural Center
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- Uptown Sister’s Bookstore
156 St. & Amsterdam

BROOKLYN

- Brooklyn Museum
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- BAM
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- Vox Pop
1022 Cortelyou Rd.
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- YWCA
3rd. & Atlantic Aves.
- Tea Lounge
Union St. & 7th Ave.
9th St. & 7th Ave.
- Veggie Castle
2242 Church Ave.
- Ozzie’s Coffee Shop
249 5th Ave.
57 7th Ave.

- Verb Café
Bedford Ave. & N. 5th St.

- Pillow Café
505 Myrtle Ave.
- El Loco Burrito
345 Graham Ave.
243 Bushwick Ave.
- Phoebe’s Café
323 Graham Ave.
- The Archive
49 Bogart St.
- Pacific Street Library
25 4th Ave.

QUEENS

- Terraza Café
40-19 Glean St,
Elmhurst
- Café Aubergine
49-22 Skillman Ave,
Flushing

BRONX

- The Point
940 Garrison Ave.

- Mothers on the Move
928 Intervale St.

STATEN
ISLAND

- St. George Library
5 Central Ave.
- Port Richmond Branch Library
75 Bennett St.
- Everything Goes Book Café
208 Bay St.

JERSEY
CITY

- The Heights Branch Library
14 Zariskie St.

HOBOKEN

- The Spa Restaurant
74 Hudson St.
- Hoboken Daily News
500 Washington St.

Inside Kenya's Explosion

By JOHN DAVID BWAKALI
KENYA INDYMEDIA

NAIROBI, Kenya—On Dec. 27, I stood in a line for six hours — from 5:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. — waiting for my turn to cast a vote in my country’s presidential, parliamentary and civic elections. When the votes were counted later that night, Raila Odinga, the opposition leader, began taking a near-unassailable lead. At one point, he led with almost one million votes. But somehow, Mwai Kibaki the incumbent president squeezed through to win a disputed victory. I can live with that. What I can’t live with, is that hundreds of Kenyans have lost their lives because of these disputed election results.

When the tension escalated, I had to move to my brother’s house because I stay in a neighborhood dominated by the Kikuyu, the biggest tribe in Kenya and also one that President Mwai Kibaki comes from. Tragically, Kikuyus around the country are bearing the brunt of an angry people and they are also beginning to retaliate.

After two days of a house arrest of sorts, it was extremely important that I leave the house. But when I tried to do so, I could not pass a human roadblock of more than 50 people who were sitting by the roadside in a tense and excited mood. But I had to proceed because I needed to call my friend in the town of Eldoret. She is from the Kikuyu community while most of her neighbors are from the Kalenjin community. Due to no fault of hers, the president happens to be from her community. Due to his own fault, the president has greatly angered the Kalenjin community together with 38 other tribal



GABRIELLA SPZUNT

communities. Even the supposedly official results show that he only led in two provinces out of eight. Consequently, members of all other communities generally feel that the president has robbed them.

I blame the people who commissioned and condoned the rigging of these elections. While I realize that most losers usually blame rigging for their losses, these particular rigging claims are not mere speculation. Samuel Kivuitu, the chairman of the Electoral Commission of Kenya has already admitted that he announced the presidential results under pressure from the President Kibaki’s Party of National Unity. He also conceded that there were widespread irregularities, which resulted in extended delays in announcing results. Both local and international observers have explicitly reported that while the actual voting process was clean, the tallying of the votes was riddled with faults. Raila Odinga has refused to accept these results. Millions of Kenyans have refused to accept these results. Commerce has been paralyzed across the country and it is not business as usual. Lives have been lost and we cannot go on like this.

Kenya is now in a state of panic. On Jan. 1, when the rest of the world was celebrat-

ing the New Year, 30 women and children were burnt alive in a church where they had sought refuge. They died because someone found it fit to rig an electoral process and someone else found it fit to either facilitate or condone that rigging. They have died because no one at a high level was prepared to quell a fire that consumed highways, byways and villages of this great nation. They have died because mass intolerance has been borne from a huge political deception.

I hold all the aforementioned persons responsible for these deaths and any other deaths that may result from this tragic situation. The blood of these fellow Kenyans is primarily on the hands of the politicians who trampled on the fundamental voting rights of our people. This innocent blood is also on the guilty hands of those whose acts of violence inflicted irreversible death blows. No injustice, however heinous, warrants murder of the innocents. As we learnt from the Rwanda genocide, this blood will also be on the hands of all those who will turn a blind eye on this simmering conflict. This is why we cannot, and must not turn a blind eye on this violence and other violent situations around the world.

TIMELINE OF AN ELECTORAL DISASTER

While the Western media has focused on scenes of shocking inter-tribal violence in Kenya and the possibility of a “second Rwanda,” the turmoil can more accurately be ascribed to smoldering resentments about a rigged political system.

Dec. 27

Millions stand in long lines to vote in Kenya’s second-ever multi-party elections. Pre-election polls show former political prisoner and opposition leader Raila Odinga to be leading.

Dec. 27

Preliminary election results show Odinga leading by over a million votes, a seemingly insurmountable advantage.

Dec. 27–30

The vote count is delayed for three days by the national election commission. International election observers are barred from watching the vote count in the central tally room in the capital of Nairobi.

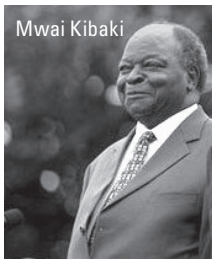


Dec. 30

Election officials announce that incumbent president Mwai Kibaki has won the final count by 220,00 votes.

Dec. 30

Kibaki is sworn in for a second term hours



after his election victory is announced. Protests and riots erupt across the country.

Dec. 30–Jan. 4

Hundreds of people are killed and a quarter million are displaced by inter-ethnic violence. Many victims are members of Kibaki’s Kikuyu community. The Kikuyu’s are the largest of Kenya’s 42 tribal communities and have dominated Kenya’s political and economic life since the country gained independence from the British in 1963.

Jan. 3

The head of Kenya’s electoral commission, tells reporters that votes had been tampered with to give the President

an advantage and that he did “not know whether Kibaki won the election.”

Jan. 3

Police beat and tear gas protesters trying to gather in Nairobi for a scheduled “million-man” rally against President Kibaki.



PHOTO: ENGLISH.ALJAZEERA.NET

operate from Kenyan bases and conducts joint exercises with U.S. troops in the region.

For the latest news, visit Kenya.indymedia.org

Jan. 7

Under pressure from the U.S., Odinga calls off planned protests and agrees to meet with Kibaki in talks mediated by the African Union. The U.S. supplies roughly \$1 billion per year in aid to Kenya, which allows American forces to

world briefs

CHAVEZ PARDONS COUP PLOTTERS

Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez rang in the new year by granting amnesty to a number of opposition leaders connected to the short-lived military coup against his government in April 2002 and a two-month oil industry shutdown which caused an estimated \$10 billion dollars damage to the economy and ended in January 2003. Among the beneficiaries of the amnesty are those who wrote and signed a decree during the coup that dissolved a number of democratically elected public institutions including the Supreme Court and the National Assembly. Chavez’s action came less than a month after his government lost a bitterly contested referendum to overhaul Venezuela’s constitution and expand his powers. “It’s a matter of turning the page. We want a country that moves toward peace,” Chavez said.

U.S. TO IRAQI REFUGEES: STAY AWAY

A new Bush administration plan to bring 1,000 Iraqi refugees per month to the U.S. is



faltering. According to the Associated Press, the number of Iraqis granted asylum since the program went into effect this fall fell from 450 in October to 362 in November and 245 in December. “This is quite a shocking result,” said Ken Bacon, president of Refugees International. “We keep hearing they are bolstering the program, but the figures keep going down.” An estimated 2.4 million Iraqis have fled their country due to the war and another two million have been internally displaced.

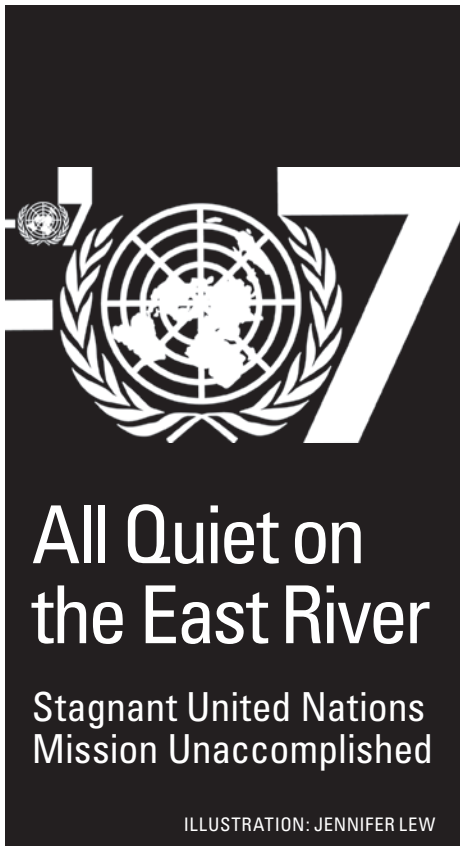
RAINFOREST DEFENDER KILLED IN BORNEO

The family and supporters of Penan chieftain Keleasu Naan are blaming loggers for his death after finding his remains in December. Naan had disappeared two months earlier and his body was found with several broken bones, prompting 100 Penan villagers to walk 60 miles to lodge a report at the closest police station and demand an investigation. Logging on the southeast Asian island has been rampant since the 1980s. In 2005, slightly more than 50 percent of Borneo’s rainforest remained. More recently, the growth of palm oil plantations has increased pressure on the forests. Palm oil is one of several biofuels being touted as a green alternative to fossil fuels.

NAFTA MEASURE SPARKS FARMER PROTESTS

Mexican farmers carried out street protests and roadblocks in three states on Jan. 9 to protest the elimination of all tariffs on corn, beans, sugar and milk that went into effect at the beginning of the year under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

The tariff measure is expected to drive hundreds of thousands of more small Mexican farmers out of business. Since NAFTA went into effect in 1994, as many as two million small farmers have lost their land.



By DONALD PANETH

UNITED NATIONS, N.Y.—On Jan. 2, I made the rounds here. I stopped by the office of the spokesman for the secretary-general, passed the tapestry replica of Picasso’s “Guernica,” and went into the delegates’ lounge. There were few people about. No meetings were scheduled.

I reflected. From the perspective of another year as a U.N. correspondent, it was discouraging that the United Nations had achieved nothing during 2007.

With a new Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon of South Korea, in charge, the United Nations simply went through the motions of taking up critical issues and desperate situations.

As correspondents here observed, when Ban spoke, he emitted clichés. Nothing noteworthy. Nothing informative, interesting, or inspiring. Of his first year in office, he said, “I have not sat still ... I have been on the go ... I flew 125,000 miles during 57 official visits ... in 39 countries.”

Frequently, when he got back, Ban stopped off at the White House.

The United States again demonstrated its unfriendliness to the United Nations. It ran up its U.N. arrears as of Oct. 31 for the regular budget, international tribunals, peace-keeping operations, and the renovation of U.N. headquarters to \$2.3 billion, more than twice the previous year. Meanwhile, the Bush administration projected a 2008 “defense” budget of \$802.9 billion.

What happened in Darfur, Sudan, where in 2007 up to an estimated 255,000 villagers had been killed and 2.2 million displaced since 2003? A joint U.N.-African Union force had been scheduled for deployment early in 2008. However, the force had fallen short in the number of troops provided, and commitments for 24 helicopters had not been met. Without the helicopters, the force would lack critical mobility and resupply capacity.

On another war front, in a gesture to Iraqi refugees, the U.N. Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees on Dec. 14 began distributing ATM cards in amounts of \$100 to \$200 to 7,000 families. More than 4.5 million Iraqis are currently uprooted — 2.4 million inside Iraq, 2.2 million outside, most in Syria and Jordan. The 7,000 will also receive food aid.

At this rate, it seemed to me, the United Nations was headed for entombment.

Donald Paneth has covered the U.N. at intervals since December 1945.



By BRIAN TOKAR

With all the fanfare that usually accompanies such gatherings, delegates to the December United Nations climate talks on the Indonesian island of Bali returned to their home countries declaring victory. Despite the continued obstructionism of the U.S. delegation, the negotiators reached a mild consensus for continued negotiations on reducing emissions of greenhouse gases, and at the very last moment were able to cajole and pressure the United States to sign on.

But in the end, the so-called “Bali roadmap” added little beside a vague timetable to the plans for renewed global climate talks that came out of a similar meeting two years ago in Montreal. With support from Canada, Japan and Russia, and the acquiescence of former ally Australia, the U.S. delegation deleted all references (except in a non-binding footnote) to the overwhelming consensus that reductions of 25 to 40 percent in annual greenhouse gas emissions are necessary by 2020 to forestall catastrophic and irreversible alterations in the earth’s climate.

In Kyoto in 1997, then-Vice President Al Gore was credited with breaking the first such deadlock in climate negotiations. He promised the assembled delegates that the United States would support mandatory emissions reductions if their implementation were based on a scheme of market-based trading of emissions. The concept of “marketable rights to pollute” had been in wide circulation in the United States for nearly a decade, but the Kyoto Protocol was the first time a so-called “cap-and-trade” scheme was to be implemented on a global scale. The result, a decade later, is the development of what British columnist George Monbiot has aptly termed “an exuberant market in fake emissions cuts.”

For a full decade now, most conversations about reducing climate-damaging carbon dioxide emissions have focused on one extremely narrow question: How can we place a sufficient monetary value on carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases so that the so-called “free market” can eventually induce corporations to reduce their emissions?

This ideological focus on the market has become perhaps the single greatest obstacle to meaningful progress against the disruption of the climate. The world capitalist market, a rather artificial invention from its origins in the late 18th century, is very good at concentrating wealth and exacerbating global inequalities, but has never been anything but an obstacle to social or environmental equity. Today, ideas like

market-traded carbon dioxide credits, and purchases of “offsets” (so people in rich countries can continue polluting, while nominally paying for emissions reductions elsewhere) have become the main excuses for postponing real changes in our economy and technologies.

Over the past year, activists across the United States and in other industrial countries have begun to dramatize the reality of potentially catastrophic global warming and pressure their governments to do something about it. Al Gore’s movie has had a mostly positive educational impact, as has the 2007 report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, documenting the “unequivocal” evidence that global warming is real and that we can already see the consequences. But most public events up to now, at least in the United States, have been rather timid in their outlook, and minimal in their expectations for real changes. Today we need a far more pointed and militant approach, a genuine People’s Agenda for Climate Justice. Such an agenda would have at least four central elements:

1. Highlighting the social justice implications of global climate disruptions. Global warming is not just a scientific issue, and it’s certainly not mainly about polar bears. As last year’s U.N. Human Development Report described so eloquently, global warming is a global justice issue, and people in the global South are already facing severe consequences from increased droughts, wildfires and major floods. Bringing home these implications can go a long way toward humanizing the problem and raise the urgency of global action.

2. Dramatizing the links between U.S. climate and energy policies and U.S. military adventures, particularly the war in Iraq, which is, without question, the most grotesquely energy-wasting activity on the planet today. Author Michael Klare has documented that troops in the Persian Gulf region consume 3.5 million gallons of oil a day, and that worldwide consumption by the U.S. military — about four times as much — are equal to the total national consumption of Switzerland or Sweden. This past October, people gathered under the banner of “No War, No Warming” blocked the entrances to a congressional office building in Washington, demanding an end to the war and real steps to prevent more catastrophic climate changes. Similar actions across the country could go a long way toward raising the pressure on politicians who consistently say the right thing and blithely vote the opposite way.

An Agenda for Climate Justice

3. Exposing the numerous false solutions to global warming promoted by the world’s elites. Billions of dollars in public and private funds are wasted on such schemes as a revival of nuclear power, mythical “clean coal” technologies (supported by Barack Obama, among others), and the massive expansion of so-called biofuels (more appropriately termed agro-fuels): liquid fuels obtained from food crops, grasses, and trees. Carbon trading and offsets are described as the only politically expedient way to reduce emissions, but they are structurally incapable of doing so. We need mandated emission reductions, a tax on carbon dioxide pollution, requirements to re-orient utility and transportation policies, public funds for solar and wind energy, and large reductions in consumption throughout the industrialized world. Buying more “green” products won’t do; we need to consume less!

4. Envisioning a new, lower-consumption world of decentralized, clean energy and politically empowered communities. Like the anti-nuclear activists of 30 years ago, who halted the first wave of nuclear power in the United States, while articulating an inspiring vision of directly democratic, solar-powered communities, we again need to dramatize the positive, even utopian, possibilities for a post-petroleum, post-mega-mall world. The technologies already exist for a locally controlled, solar-based alternative, at the same time that dissatisfaction with today’s high-consumption, high-debt “American way of life” appears to be at an all-time high. Small experiments in living more locally, are improving the quality of life and thriving everywhere. So are experiments in community-controlled renewable energy production.

The reality of global warming is too urgent, and the outlook far too bleak, to settle for status-quo false solutions that only appear to address the problem. Real solutions to global warming, as Van Jones of San Francisco’s Ella Baker Center has pointed out, are also far more likely to benefit our inner cities and put millions of people to work installing decentralized, energy-saving technologies.

Al Gore is correct when he says that political will is the main obstacle to addressing global warming, but we also need to be able to look beyond the status-quo and struggle for a different kind of world.

Brian Tokar’s books include Earth for Sale, Redesigning Life?, and Gene Traders.



DANA VINDIGNI

Charlie Wilson's War
DIRECTED BY MIKE NICHOLS
UNIVERSAL PICTURES, PARTICIPANT
PRODUCTION, 2007

The Kite Runner
DIRECTED BY MARC FORSTER
DREAMWORKS, PARTICIPANT PRODUCTIONS, 2007

Hollywood Goes to Afghanistan

Not since Slim Pickens' death-defying ride on an atom bomb in *Dr. Strangelove* has anyone had as much fun with weapons on-screen as Tom Hanks' based-on-reality character does in *Charlie Wilson's War*.

They called him Good-Time Charlie, and they were right. Rep. Charles Wilson (D-Texas) liked almost everyone and everything, especially whiskey, women and a good fight. A liberal Democrat from Texas, he arrived in the House in 1973. At that time "liberal" was still the opposite of "radical," not a synonym for it, and Wilson favored Medicaid, the Equal Rights Amendment, women's right to choose abortion and U.S. interventionism — big time.

He didn't like communism, though. Having lost Nicaragua's Somoza dictatorship to Marxist Sandinista revolutionaries in 1979, he grabbed the chance to redeem himself when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. By the time he had finished masterminding the aid to the mujahadin resistance that was the largest U.S. covert operation to that point, many saw him as the one-man army responsible for the coup de grace to the moribund Soviet empire.

Now Mike Nichols, Hollywood's last great satirist, has put Wilson's story into a smoothly ambiguous, star-studded movie that's almost a shoo-in for a Best Picture Oscar. The script, based on the book by Richard Krile, was written by Aaron Sorkin, author of *A Few Good Men* and creator of *The West Wing*. The film contains bravura performances by three Academy Award winners: Philip Seymour Hoffman as the loose-cannon CIA agent Gust Avrakotas who helps Wilson "kill some Russians" (to the tune, during the slaughter, of "And he shall purify" from Handel's *Messiah*); Julia Roberts playing against type as Joanne Herring, the Texas conservative who seduces Wilson into taking on Afghanistan; and the well-loved Tom Hanks as Good-Time Charlie himself.

Mike Nichols, however, is no Stanley Kubrick, and Aaron Sorkin sometimes overworks the crowd-pleasing. Here he has it both ways — U.S. interventionism is megamaniacal and maybe even murderous, but whoopee! We won the Cold War!

Charlie Wilson's War isn't satire, just a rollicking tale of a guy enjoying every minute of a noble fight. Whatever it says about

U.S. foreign policy, it fudges or rescinds in the next sentence. A note at the end quotes Wilson's declaration that we "fucked up the end-game" in Afghanistan, meaning that the failure to help rebuild the country led to the rise of the Taliban.

But that's not really what happened, is it? Charlie, Mike, Aaron — can't any of you say "blowback"? It's what happens when you arm one set of people you don't much like to fight people you like even less: the guys you arm come back and bite you in the ass. Big time.

Usually they bite their own people, too. The film *The Kite Runner* is about the world Charlie Wilson's war left behind, although both the movie and the novel on which the film is based are essentially silent about the covert war against the Soviet Union and the subsequent U.S. attack on Afghanistan in 2001.

The novel, by Khaled Hosseini, was the United States' number three best-seller in 2005. An epic tale of war, violence — including public execution and homosexual pedophilic rape (twice!) — betrayal and redemption, it featured not one but two sets of villains we love to hate, the Soviet Union and the Taliban.

The Kite Runner is the story of Amir, a motherless youth in 1970s Kabul, who loves his macho father, his best friend Hassan and kite contests in which kite strings coated in ground glass are used to cut opponents' kite strings. The winner is the one with the last one flying, who gets to collect the cut kites. Hassan is the best finder of those kites — the best kite-runner — in Kabul.

But Amir loses his friend through a shameful act of cowardice and betrayal, then loses his home when the Soviet invasion turns the family into refugees. Thirty years later, he has the chance — if he can find the courage — to return to Kabul and rescue Hassan's young son from a vicious Taliban leader who is keeping the child as a sexual plaything.

Shot in western China, *The Kite Runner* is gorgeous to look at and a rich crash course on Afghan culture, and Ahmad Khan Mahmizada is touching and tender as the hero-worshipping child Hassan. (He has received such harsh criticism for playing the victim of a homosexual rape that he has allegedly had to leave Afghanistan.) The novel's complex plot, however, has been compressed to fit the movie, and with much nuance lost, many passages are unconvincing. Espe-

cially flat are the crucial failure of courage of young Amir (Zekeria Ebrahimi) and the pure evil of the villainous Assef (Elham Ehsas/Abdul Salam Yusoufzai).

Afghanistan isn't Iraq. The American people may feel bad about Iraq, but we think we were the good guys in Afghanistan. We also still suspect that Arabs and Muslims (they're the same, aren't they?) are our enemies.

And like Aaron Sorkin, Hollywood and the public also like to have it both ways. We condemn the Iraq war while condoning and

even celebrating our conduct in Afghanistan playing to widespread unease about Iraq without challenging the basic premises of Arab/Muslim evil and, most of all, our country's fundamental right to rule. The absence of that challenge may be precisely what made *The Kite Runner* novel such a mega-hit; the mixed message may well carry Charlie Wilson's War to multiple Academy Awards.

—JUDITH MAHONEY PASTERNAK

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Contradictory Feminism

Learning to Drive and Other Life Stories

By KATHA POLLITT
RANDOM HOUSE, 2007

The eleven essays in *Nation* columnist Katha Pollitt’s latest book are a sharp departure from the savvy political writing she’s known for. Instead of skewering the Bush administration or anti-abortion activists, *Learning to Drive* is Pollitt’s reflection on who she has become: a widely-read, progressive intellectual of middle age.

The result of this foray into identity is both deeply personal and deeply engaging. But it is also unsettling, for while the collection is devoid of heavy-handed messages, Pollitt’s feminism is not without its contradictions. For example, despite her deep appreciation for the gains of feminist social activism — gains she participated in winning — she has not shed her need for male approval. A come-hither look or the flirtatious banter of a male aggressor is enough, she admits, to send her aflutter.

Or worse. In an essay called “Webstalker,” Pollitt confesses her obsession with an ex-boyfriend once she discovers that he is a philanderer. After seven years of what she believed to be devoted monogamy, evidence of numerous peccadilloes sends her soaring into cyberspace, desperate to learn his conquests’ names, addresses, ages and occupations. Humor is abundant, but the fact that someone as publicly self-assured and astute as Pollitt can end up compulsively prowling the Web, is proof that anyone can go a little crazy given the right circumstances. I found myself wincing at her admissions while cheering her bravery for laying them bare.

Fishy Business

My introduction to sushi came via Molly Ringwald’s sushi-packing princess in *The Breakfast Club*. “Eww!” I responded when told it was raw fish.

My attitude has changed course markedly. Like other aficionados of sushi (and sashimi), I can wax joyful about the difference between similar-sounding cuts of fish such as *chu-toro* and *o-toro*; *hamachi* and *kanpachi*; *anago*, *unagi* and *uni*.

The thought of prepackaged sushi still disgusts me, however. It violates every principle of seasonality and freshness essential to sushi. The cuts are inferior. The vibrancy and flavor of raw fish diminish quickly; after sitting around for hours, it’s garbage.

Beyond epicurean considerations are economic ones. Prepackaged sushi is not the craft of a sushi *shokunin*. Like other artisanal jobs, it’s been de-skilled, performed by inferior hands, or in the unkindest cut, by a robot. The goal is to maximize profits by eliminating skilled labor and expensive ingredients. The result is a flood of limp, bland sushi filling deli cases and emptying oceans.

One writer’s solution is a “grand pact” whereby customers forge personal relationships with sushi chefs who guide them to what is freshest and best on a particular day. This traditional Japanese approach to sushi, argues Trevor Corson, author of *The Zen of Fish*, would rescue bluefin tuna from being eaten to extinction.

With sushi so ubiquitous, it’s useless to ask Americans to forgo grabbing a pack of sushi to slop in their pie hole for lunch. Anyone who treats sushi as fast food doesn’t care about its quality.

Moreover, it’s a myth that Japanese belly up to wooden sushi bars for cheery banter with and fresh delectables from their favorite chef. This is largely for the corporate class, argues Sasha Issenberg, author of *The Sushi Economy*. The middle class gets it fix at one of Japan’s 3,500 conveyor-belt joints known as *kaiten-zushi* (“turnover sushi”).

Issenberg describes how the conveyor belt introduced factory-floor practices to the sushi bar. It eliminates some labor, waiters, as customers serve themselves, while subjecting others, the chef, who formerly made each piece to order, to assembly-line speed-up. The chief

innovator of *kaiten-zushi* modeled a chain after McDonald’s, encouraging customers not to linger — the ones being “turned over.”

In Japan, this opened the door to takeout and convenience stores. Issenberg argues that these changes have returned sushi to its origin as a quick meal, but its popularity also means an enormous supply of fish must be endlessly drawn from ailing seas.

One fish, bluefin tuna, is at the heart of sushi and Issenberg’s book. He covers well-charted waters, how the fatty bluefin went from a junk fish in Japan to the prized catch, while offering insight, such as how the Atlantic bluefin trade began in the 1970s in a quest to fill empty cargo holds of Japanese airlines returning from North America.

The Sushi Economy travels from the famed and archaic Tsukiji Market in Tokyo where bluefin is auctioned off at exorbitant prices to the boom and bust of a Massachusetts fishing town reliant on bluefin to industrialized tuna “ranching” in Australia to the tuna pirates of the Mediterranean.

Issenberg adroitly describes the globalized bluefin economy, but he’s over his head discussing economics, saying deficit when he means surplus, arguing a strong Yen makes Japanese exports cheaper, when the exact opposite is the case, and misdating the NASDAQ market crash of 2000. He also misses the latest development. With bluefin prices rising because of a growing Russian and Chinese appetite for sushi, the Japanese are turning to less expensive substitute sushi meats such as smoked deer and raw horse.

Absurdly, Issenberg downplays the environmental impact, writing, “No one knows enough about tuna populations and behavior to squarely place blame for overfishing,” and speculating that the crash in tuna hauls may be because bluefin have “wisened up” to fishing methods.

There is little dispute that overfishing is wiping out the Atlantic bluefin. Charles Clover, in *The End of The Line*, cites an important study published in *Nature* in 2003 that concluded only 10 percent of all large fish are left because “industrial fishing has scoured the global ocean.”

The environment editor of the *Daily Telegraph* (U.K.), Clover is a seasoned hand at covering the industry. In 1997, he broke the

THE SUSHI ECONOMY
SASHA ISSENBERG
GOTHAM BOOKS, 2007

THE END OF THE LINE
CHARLES CLOVER
THE NEW PRESS, 2006

story of how 50 percent of the cod being sold in Britain was “black fish,” caught illegally, despite an elaborate system of regulations, quotas and inspections. It caused a brief uproar, but little changed.

Clover uncovered all manners of cheating: overfilled boxes to skirt quotas, private sales away from inspectors’ eyes, mislabeled catches, boats misreporting locations, skippers turning off monitoring devices.

The End of The Line is devastating reading. Clover keelhauls all hands for the role they play in strip-mining oceans: governments, regulators, consumers, celebrity chefs, scientists, even environmentalists. (Clover argues because tuna boats changed methods to avoid dolphin bycatches, “twenty different species are now in bad shape,” including whales, turtles, sharks, rays, and many fish species.)

Clover places most blame on “the tyranny of the fishermen’s point of view,” which has allowed them to dominate the science, information and regulation of fishing. He casts too wide a net, however, as what he is mostly complaining about is capital-intensive commercial boats.

There is also a surprising villain: the European Union. He quotes one observer as stating, “Most of the major pirate fleets are now owned by European capital.” With 25 countries jockeying for their slice of the seas, the E.U. is more concerned with keeping each country happy rather than ensuring sustainable harvests.

Clover has a keen eye, recognizing that the terms, such as “maximum sustainable yield” or wild fish being labeled “stock,” as if they lived in a warehouse, are biased toward commercialization.

As for solutions, Clover falls short. While calling for better enforcement, stricter regulation and an end to subsidies, he advocates market-based solutions, such as “property rights” on the seas, or tries to guilt-trip the reader to stop buying endangered species from the fish monger. He’s unable to see that the market is the problem, and that the oceans need to be preserved for their own sake, rather than managed solely for human needs.

—A.K. GUPTA

“Learning to Drive,” the title tract, is similarly themed. Originally published in *The New Yorker* in 2001, it introduces a then 52-year-old Pollitt at her most incompetent.

“I am here because I lost my man,” she writes. “How did this happen to me? For decades, all around me, women were laying claim to forbidden manly skills — how to fix the furnace, perform brain surgery, hunt seals, have sex without love. Only I, it seems, stood still, growing, if anything, more helpless as the machines in my life increased in

both number and complexity.”

Ben, her driving teacher, is patient, but he is becoming frustrated by her ostensible inability to master the task. Should you be wondering, this story has a happy ending — other essays position Pollitt behind the wheel, barreling from hither to yon. Still, her vulnerability is reassuring, for who among us quickly masters everything we attempt?

Self-deprecation is abundant throughout *Learning to Drive* as Pollitt homes in on the source of her insecurities: her communist father and fierce, alcoholic moth-

er. Other essays blend autobiography and observation to lampoon Marxist study groups and assess the ways women compete and console, deal with motherhood, and adjust to aging and physical deterioration. In one piece Pollitt reminisces about editing pornographic novels as a fresh-out-of-college twenty-something.

“Goodbye, Lenin” zeroes in on Pollitt’s father’s life and death and is the most moving commentary in the collection. In it she recounts how a FOIA request led her to her father’s five-inch FBI file. Reading it, she gleans information about

blacklists, the Communist Party and the Smith Act and finds a way to understand the many pushes and pulls that governed his life. The writing is lovely, rich with reverence and wit.

And that’s true of every entry in *Learning to Drive*. Of course, some essays will resonate more than others for individual readers. Regardless, Pollitt’s insights cogently remind us of a 20th century feminist truism: Even when it is only implicit, the personal is political and vice-versa.

—ELEANOR J. BADER

Transcendental Misanthropy

There Will Be Blood
DIRECTED BY P.T. ANDERSON
GHOULARDI FILM COMPANY,
PARAMOUNT VANTAGE, AND
MIRAMAX, 2007

Paul Thomas Anderson’s *There Will Be Blood* could not have been released at a more opportune time. With its wicked portrayal of two men who willingly abuse God and family in pursuit of their own greedy interests, it’s the ultimate Christmas movie. And as it weaves through the characters of these men a tapestry of our darkest historical pursuits — the insatiable quest for and dependence on oil and religious fundamentalism — it becomes not just an Old West version of the Bush administration, but something far richer: a pitch-black mirror of the American soul. To watch the slow moral ruin of the oil man Daniel Plainview (Daniel Day-Lewis) and the small-town preacher Eli Sunday (Paul Dano) is to witness the underbelly of our

national character writ large. It’s no wonder that Anderson needs a big canvas. Adapted from part of Upton Sinclair’s *Oil!*, the film is like a classical epic Western turned so odd and troubled that it’s become estranged from its own genre. The first 20 minutes wordlessly demonstrate Plainview’s ruthless determination as he prospects for silver and then cashes in before seeking medical help for a broken leg. He moves on to oil, and we move ahead a few years to see him adopt a child whose father died in a well accident. It soon becomes clear that the boy’s face is just advertising, a way to smooth over his new father’s ruthless business practices. The majority of the film is devoted to a subsequent battle of wills between Plainview and Eli Sunday, the preacher and faith healer of the small town of Little Boston. Having received a tip about an “ocean of oil” under the town from Eli’s twin brother Paul, Plainview sets about acquiring as much land as possible, while Eli builds his church as a form of resistance. Two sides of the same coin, the men struggle, humiliating each other in scenes that are simultaneously horrifying and hilarious. Building to a final sequence of genuinely operatic insanity, the film’s tone deftly

balances the hard-scrabble with the baroque, as if we were watching *Greed* remade by late-period Sam Fuller. Shaming his hollow, would-be epics *Boogie Nights* and *Magnolia*, Anderson here filters his epic scale through the oddball eccentricities of *Punch-Drunk Love*, as in the weirdly appropriate fusion of Robert Elswit’s neo-classical photography with the unnerving score by Radiohead’s Jonny Greenwood. It’s a credit to the director that he doesn’t shy away from depicting Sunday’s own exploitation of the town — he’s a charlatan and the movie doesn’t hide it. If the preacher seems less monstrous than Plainview, it’s merely a matter of subtlety in Dano’s nuanced, careful performance when up against Day-Lewis’ titanic malevolence. Seeming 11 feet tall, his eyes piercing through every scene, Day-Lewis takes Plainview to the place where, like Brando’s Don Corleone, the character seems to create his own mythology. Letting down his guard in a drunken conversation with a man claiming to be his long-lost brother, Day-Lewis is so convincing that he becomes a one-man argument for misanthropy as a way of life.

—CHARLIE BASS



reader comments

Continued from Page 2

Reponses to “Student Antiwar Walkouts Spark Small Town Backlash,” Dec. 8:

STUDENTS: STAY STRONG!
Hail to the new revolution! How would the school have handled a pro-war rally? Intimidation? Cops? Suspensions? Administrative leave for participating teachers? This sentence alone speaks volumes: “There were more police officers there than when we have a bomb threat at our school.” Stay persistent and your voices will grow in numbers and you will be heard. “The right to assemble” is what the powers that be fear. They want to silence anyone that opposes this war. Your voices have been heard. I hear ya way over here

in New Jersey! I am so very proud of all of you. Stand your ground. This is your country also and you are entitled to your opinion and the right to assemble!
—DONNA

Response to “Kara Walker: Shadows of the Past,” Dec. 8:

ONGOING RACISM
Amazing that hundreds of years after the Emancipation Proclamation, folks are still fighting racism/discrimination. Maybe nothing much has changed and the chains are off but the slave system is still intact/global? Hmmmm.
—PUBLIUS

Responses to “From the Punk Scene to Acoustic Theory,” Dec. 8:

NARROW-MINDED PUNKS
I agree in many ways with John Zerzan. I feel as if there have always been a lot of people in the punk scene that are extremely narrow-minded and when you do not fit exactly into their view of what music and politics should look like they shun you entirely thus creating a somewhat of a fascist dimension to a scene that many people subscribe to to escape those very aspects of mainstream culture!
—ERIK

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